

DIGITAL MEDIA INEQUALITIES

***POLICIES AGAINST DIVIDES,
DISTRUST AND DISCRIMINATION***

JOSEF TRAPPEL (ed.)

NORDICOM

Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research

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THE
EUROMEDIA
RESEARCH
GROUP

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Digital Media Inequalities

Policies against divides, distrust and discrimination

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Preface

When members of the Euromedia Research Group convened in Lisbon in November 2014 for the group's 56th meeting, they were invigorated by the preceding ECREA Conference, and pleased that the group had successfully delivered the manuscript of *Media in Crisis* to the publisher (Routledge) only a few weeks earlier (Trappel, Steemers, & Thomass, 2015). At that meeting, we all knew that something had changed. Starting from the research interest of the members and judging by the rapid changes in the field of media and communication, a critical observation was shared: digitalisation is not just about transforming the media and communications business; its social implications run far deeper than Silicon Valley pundits would have people across the globe believe.

The following debate quickly generated new research questions about: “*inequalities of the media in Europe*”. The group met a further seven times to explore further common understandings of observed inequalities in the existing media landscape and the emerging digitally transformed media world. In each of these meetings, members presented concepts and draft chapters for a future book. Along the way, the group struggled to develop a common understanding of the numerous strands in which media inequalities occur. It became clear that the scholarly and dominating discourse on inequalities, focusing either on wealth and income, or on race, class and gender, is not always sufficient to understand the variety and diversity of inequalities in media and communication.

Denis McQuail, the late Honorary President of the group, delivered his thoughts on equality and the media in a discussion paper, which became a crucial reference document for further work. Although his health did not allow him to participate in group meetings at that point, he revised his draft after receiving comments from our meetings. His chapter in this volume is his (unfinished) manuscript, slightly and carefully edited, based on handwritten notes he left after he passed away on 25th June 2017. We thank Denis' daughter, Rachel, for sharing these notes with us. All other chapters of this volume refer to Denis' work in some way.

The group is deeply grateful for Denis' intellectual and personal contributions over the entire life span of the Euromedia Research Group, of which he became a founding

member in March 1982. Tribute is also paid by his many friends and collaborators in the *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 32 (6) 2017.

The April 2018 group meeting in Bergen, Norway marked the final approval of the book's manuscript. Chapters had gone through an (in some cases lengthy) in-depth process of peer-reviewing by other group members, facilitating critical debates, which were often more rigorous and thorough than in a blind peer-reviewing exercise. Some of the chapters have been considerably altered by this discursive process, which also included debates in the plenary sessions of the group as well as individual reviews. Chapter authors appreciated the opportunity to engage with their reviewers in a dialogue that contributed to a better understanding of the underlying themes of the volume.

Because of this re-iterating review process, the book is more than just another edited volume; it represents the collective efforts of the Euromedia Research Group, although each chapter has its own authors. As in other books by the group (recently d'Haenens, Sousa, & Trappel, 2018; for more information, see www.euromediagroup.org), a number of guest authors have also contributed: Judit Bayer, Anna Gladkova, Willem Joris, Kristine Juraitė, Quint Kik, Ralph Negrine, and Sara de Vuyst. Many thanks!

The group is particularly thankful to Nordicom, its publisher, for their excellent work in publishing this book in an open access format, which is most appreciated, and gives all access in the spirit of equality.

Josef Trappel, for the Euromedia Research Group
Salzburg, September 2018

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Chapter 1

Inequality, (new) media and communications

Josef Trappel

Inequalities have been the unwanted companion of media and communications since public communications emerged. Traditional mass media were criticized for creating inequalities by being biased, serving hegemonic interests, accumulating far too much power in the hands of mighty industrial conglomerates and creating knowledge gaps among their various audiences. Journalism contributed to gender and race discrimination in news rooms and to accepting informal news selection rules in favour of those in power, thereby dwarfing their watchdog role in democracies. Under the digital regime, which evolved around the establishment of the Internet as the core distribution platform in the late 1990s, most of these inequalities survived and new ones occurred. Knowledge gaps have transformed into digital divides, advertising revenues have migrated to social networking sites, which challenge traditional news journalism, and global corporate monopolies outperform media companies and nation state media regulation alike. In addition, algorithmic selection, surveillance, big data and the Internet of Things are creating new forms of inequality that follow the traditional patterns of class, gender, wealth and education.

Inequality should not exist. According to fundamental rights and freedoms, all humans are equal. Democratic constitutions are built on this premise; international diplomatic relations respect this principle and the third estate (judiciary) is fundamentally rooted in the equality of people. However, the contrast to our day-to-day life could not be more pronounced. We are constantly held back against others because of our gender, the colour of our skin, our ethnicity, our social status, our class, our wealth and income and many other factors compromising our fundamental right to equality.

Perhaps for this reason, the inequality debate is one of the “long sellers” both in the political discourse of the day and within the scientific debate in sociology, economics, psychology and many other social science disciplines. Actually, it is a necessarily recurring topos within social sciences, as every cycle of capitalist economic crisis inevitably discharges in contestations regarding inequality. The latest such crisis, originating in the global collapse of financial markets in 2008, once again initiated a heated debate on

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the trends of and damage caused by increasing inequalities. Subsequently, numerous contributions to the public debate were tabled, most prominently from economists. Anthony B. Atkinson (2016), Branko Milanovic (2016), Thomas Piketty (2013; in English 2014), Joseph Stiglitz (2012) and many more have all pointed to the rising inequality in the first decades of this century. Their concern has mainly addressed inequality in wealth and income.

Two years after the financial market crisis of 2008, the Council of Europe adopted its new strategy and action plan for social cohesion. In this document, the Council of Ministers underlined the importance of the fight against inequality and argued (in paragraph 2) that in a “cohesive society the well-being of all is a shared goal that includes the aim of ensuring adequate resources are available to combat inequalities and exclusion” (Council of Europe, 2010). In the reading of the European Union, social cohesion is primarily a matter of regional development that the EU is supporting with no less than EUR 352 billion from 2014 to 2020, representing about one-third of the overall EU budget (European Commission, 2014). Both transnational European institutions perceive social equality as a precondition for social welfare and stability.

In the media and communication field, the economic upheaval of 2008, together with more structural changes (such as digitization and the advent of global social network sites), caused fundamental crises for the advertising-based business model of leading news media worldwide. In parallel to the economic analyses of the implications of the financial crisis for inequality, the question arises of how the various (digital) media crises have influenced and moulded equality in media and communications.

In this chapter, therefore, various approaches to inequality are introduced with the purpose of addressing the relationship between inequalities on the one hand and media and communications on the other. In the literature, this relation is often mentioned but less often chosen as a prism for analysis. Servaes and Oyedemi (2016) collected theories and empirical evidence in their first of two volumes on social inequality and the media (at the time of writing, the second volume has not been published). Similar to their approach, in our book, we basically ask three groups of questions:

1. What are the implications of social inequalities for media and communications? How do the existing inequalities frame media and communication structures? How are the media themselves performing with regard to equality – as employers (being just and fair towards their workers), as reporters on current affairs or as suppliers of information, education and entertainment?
2. What are the implications of media and communications for inequalities? In what way do media and communications contribute to or reduce social inequalities? Are people served equally by the media in relation to the access to and availability of the best information and knowledge?
3. What kind of media and communication policy is needed to address inappropriate inequalities in the age of digital communications?

With respect to the rich epistemological history of the notion of inequality, a number of approaches are reviewed and critically discussed before returning to inequalities in, by and through media and communications.

Economic approaches to inequality

When inequality is addressed publicly, economic causes and implications often dominate the discourse. The major concern of economic approaches is the development of inequality of income, pay and wealth (Galbraith, 2016: 2). Galbraith and other economists have typically asked whether inequality has good or bad effects on the overall economic and social performance of an economic system (ibid.: 7) and what kind of effects inequality has on economic efficiency and individual welfare (Bourguignon, 2015: 15). Another prominent feature of the economic analysis of inequality is its long-term development within and between countries in the context of globalization.

To start with the latter, traditional evidence from economic analysis has suggested an inverted U-curve when it comes to economic development and inequality in wealth and income. This seminal theory by Simon Kuznets from the 1950s stipulates that inequality increases during the early phase of economic development and decreases over time (Milanovic, 2016: 4). While such devolution has been well supported by evidence from the twentieth century, it is hard to explain the sharp increase in inequality in the United States and other developed countries during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

In general, economists have agreed that inequality, when plotted against income, has decreased *between* countries but increased *within* countries. The former chief economist of the World Bank, Francois Bourguignon, explained this increase as follows:

There are various factors at play in the rise in inequality within countries: increased returns on physical, financial, and human (which is to say, of skilled labor) capital, economic restructuring, technological innovation, macroeconomic policy, taxation, and market deregulation, including the deregulation of the financial and labor markets. In a majority of countries, the conjunction of these effects has resulted in a significant rise in wage and income inequality. (Bourguignon, 2015: 114)

Two drivers of inequality stand out: on the one hand, privatization and deregulation allow individuals to become extremely rich, thus increasing income inequality; on the other hand, Bourguignon pointed to new information and communication technologies (ICTs), which allowed the replacement of lower-paid workers with fewer higher-skilled workers and enabled new businesses to create superstars in the very high income bracket (ibid.: 87). Some of these superstars are writers, athletes and artists who profit from the audience multiplication possibilities provided by ICTs. Furthermore, “[a]dvances in communication and information technology have increased the volume of financial

operations and made it possible for a single person to manage a huge portfolio, often worth a few billion dollars, and to generate larger profits” (ibid.: 88).

As a result, globalization has (at least) two facets. While globalized trade has made it possible to pull several hundred million people above the threshold of absolute poverty, in particular in Latin America, China and Russia (ibid.: 117), thereby reducing inequality between countries, globalization has contributed to the increase in inequality within countries.

This sheds light on the other questions concerning whether inequalities have positive or adverse effects on the economy and on individual welfare. Again, the economists’ answers are ambivalent. In general, economies with a lower degree of wage and salary inequality function better and “with lower inequalities come the benefits that we associate with civilized life: public pensions, health insurance, free public education, national parks, and cultural amenities” (Galbraith, 2016: 9). However, this comes at a cost, as a “more-equal society may be poorer, on average, than it was before, with the misery shared by all” (ibid.: 6). This can be explained by the argument that “the simple fact of dividing the cake more equally will shrink the size of the cake” (Bourguignon, 2015: 129). Although Bourguignon himself did not classify this argument as being very robust, there seems to be a trade-off between social equality and welfare in economic terms.

Another equation, no less important, concerns the cost of social inequality. Economists have identified two sorts of such costs. To start with, economic efficiency suffers from inequality when the resource allocation is distorted, for example when credit markets allocate credit to wealthy (thus trustworthy) customers, instead of those with innovative but risky business propositions. Similarly, talent, gender and education may represent areas of distorted resource allocation if wealthy, but not the most promising, candidates are chosen (Bourguignon, 2015: 132). In addition, excessive economic inequalities may lead to social unrest and endemic violence with a high socio-economic cost. Social history is well equipped with examples, both in the more distant European past and more recently in developing countries.

Thus, if reduced economic inequality is the aim, the state policy needs to support forces that drive inequality downwards. Milanovic (2016: 4) identified two such categories. “Malign forces” are wars, natural catastrophes and epidemics. Such events potentially harm humans equally, although more affluent people have better chances of safeguarding an escape route or implementing their individual exit strategy. In any case, malign forces do not constitute adequate policy options. “Benign forces”, in contrast, refer to potentially successful policy tools, such as widely accessible education, increased social transfers and progressive taxation (ibid.).

The latter option, social transfers and progressive taxes, is particularly popular in the economic literature. Some economists have pinpointed financial markets as appropriate objects of taxation: both James Tobin (“Tobin tax”) in the 1970s and lately Thomas Piketty have suggested taxing financial transactions. The latter introduced an “optimal tax policy”, which “involves a progressive tax on labor income and a progressive tax

on inherited wealth” (Piketty, 2015: 453). In his own conclusions, however, Piketty admits that he might have overemphasized taxation and devoted too little attention to institutional evolution, such as intellectual property rights (ibid.: 456). Nonetheless, economists consider policy as a necessary instrument to address inequality:

If we think that excessive levels of inequality within a nation are more unacceptable, economically costly, and socially dangerous, then we should seek to identify and implement policies that would permit us to correct these inequalities or prevent them from emerging (...). (Bourguignon, 2015: 118)

To conclude, the economic discourse on inequality provides ample evidence that societies benefit from more equal distribution of income and wealth and that capitalism does not self-correct towards less inequality. Even economic “superstar” Bill Gates admitted this when reviewing Piketty’s book (Gates, 2014: 2): “excess wealth concentration can have a snowball effect if left unchecked”.

With regard to media and communications, the distinction of inequalities between and within countries is as useful as the conclusion that policy is needed to correct undesired inequality. Furthermore, economic market imperfections favouring wealth over talent can be observed in the media and communication realm. Finally, the prominent role of ICTs in the analysis of economic inequalities emphasizes our own media- and communication-centric analysis.

Social approaches to inequality

Social approaches to inequality differ from economic approaches by extending the scope beyond income, pay and wealth (while still including them). “Social inequalities are usually described as the unequal distribution of opportunities, rewards, goods, wealth, education, healthcare, and punishment for different socially defined categories of persons within a group or society” (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2016: 24). Such a wider definition includes the classical sociological approaches represented by Karl Marx, explaining social stratification and inequality through the fundamental cleavages in capitalist societies “between those who owned and controlled (productive) capital and the majority who did not” (Preston & Silke, 2017: 4328), and Max Weber, focusing on class, status and group affiliation as well as market capacities (Curran, 2016: 7; Sernau, 2014).

Contemporary sociological theory emphasizes two additional components when defining inequality: collaborative projects and strategic resources. Canadian sociologist Bernd Balduš stipulates that inequality

exists where people are engaged in a collaborative project, and where the resulting gains in wealth, power or social standing flowing to some are not shared by others, or are obtained at their expense by increasing their deprivation, powerlessness or social exclusion. (Balduš, 2017: 7)

He continues by highlighting the importance of possessing strategic resources, characterized by their ability to increase the opportunities for further accumulation. In his view, four such strategic resources stand out: “the ownership of material wealth, the control of knowledge, the use of influence, authority and power over other people, and the ability to include or exclude other from social relations” (ibid.).

Contemporary German sociology also considers resources as the key to understanding inequalities. According to Nicole Burzan (2012), the command of socially relevant resources and different participation possibilities define inequality (ibid.: 7). In Reinhard Kreckel’s scholarly reflections, resources translate into *social goods* and *social positions*:

Social inequality in the broader sense occurs where the possibilities of access to generally available and desirable social goods and/or to social positions equipped with unequal power or interaction possibilities are permanently restricted and thus affect positively or negatively the chances of life of the concerned individuals, groups or societies. (Kreckel, 2004: 17) (translation by author)

By way of revisiting and extending such classical thinking, Amartya Sen (2009) and Göran Therborn (2013) suggest understanding inequality as “(...) unequal capabilities to function fully as a human being” (Therborn, 2013: 48). For the purpose of our focus on inequalities in media and communications, we follow Sen by arranging the “capability perspective over the resource perspective” (Sen, 2009: 263): “The capability approach focuses on human lives, and not just on the resources people have, in the form of owning – or having use of – objects of convenience that a person may possess” (ibid.: 253). This approach fits well with the rather immaterial world of media and communications, in which ownership is crucial in terms of economy, power and control but less important at the level of users and citizens. Access to and participation in the public discourse is determined not by the physical ownership of media and communication artefacts (newspaper copies, radio receivers, TV sets, smartphones, laptops, etc.) but rather by their content appropriation and use.

The capabilities approach transcends equally well the sphere of digital communication within the notorious information or network society (Castells, 1996; van Dijk, 2012; Webster, 2014). There, inequality is primarily created by cleavages between skilful users of digital technologies and those without proper access or appropriate capabilities to exploit digital opportunities for their own benefit and advantage. Furthermore, substantial inequalities occur at the macro (policy, technology) and meso (company) levels.

According to Therborn (2013: 55ff), there are four distinct ways to create social inequalities. For each of these four ways, a number of (research) questions arise to guide our analysis:

1. Distanciation: Do media and communication applications, companies and actors enable some to distance others? Does the use of so-called “social media” provide tools to outpace other people? Who is better informed than others? To what extent does distanciation create and aggravate the existing digital divides?

Does audience fragmentation support distancing? Does unequal information received and used create new forms of distancing?

2. Exploitation (the worst way of creating inequality): Who is exploited by whom in traditional and modern media and communications? What role do freelance and employed journalists play in contemporary media organizations? How is creative work by users being exploited by social network sites, such as Facebook, Youtube and Instagram? Who owns private data created by users of digital platforms and services of digital intermediaries? To what extent do internet intermediaries exploit the private data of internet users without prior consent?
3. Exclusion: Who is excluded from media coverage today? Are women systematically excluded from leading positions and decision making in the old and new media industry (given that Internet giants are all led by males and internet/software business is predominantly male dominated as well)? Who is affected by first-, second- and third-level digital divides (see Elena Vartanova & Anna Gladkova, this volume, chapter 12)? What problems arise from resource inequality when and if net neutrality is sacrificed to commercial business interests? What new cleavages arise between urban and peripheral areas and between countries of the global north and the global south (in connectivity, cost of access and service quality)?
4. Hierarchization: To what extent do media organizations allow for flat hierarchies? What implications do “terms of use” have for users of so-called “social media”, given the unequal distribution of power between users and platform owners, including lock-in strategies? Why and how did the hierarchy of central and peripheral actors in the digital news business develop?

Thus, the umbrella research questions for this book are the following:

In what way and to what extent do the media and communications in different countries contribute to creating and/or reducing inequalities? What role do digital technologies play in this process?

Media- and communication-centric approaches to inequality

Inequalities have been a feature of the media throughout their history: from exclusive publications for the noble and the clergy (see also Jeremy Tunstall, this volume, chapter 4), to information agents for wealthy traders and to organs of the privileged classes. Only in the twentieth century did the media become mass products available to all, with low barriers to access and consumption – some of them even free of charge (commercial TV and radio, commuter press and online media).

While being so prominent in economics and sociology, media and communication studies did not excel in researching inequalities. There is, of course, one strand

in the research literature dealing with the triad of race, class and gender in the media (an updated overview of this research tradition can be found in the scholarly reader edited by Dines & Humez, 2017). This triad is itself rooted in sociological work and transposed into communications and the media. The concept of intersectionality also includes dimensions such as religion, ethnicity in general and so on (Young, 1997). Other than that, Peter Golding's observation that "[i]nequality has seldom been in the foreground of communication scholarship" (2017: 4305) seems to be accurate. In a special issue of the *International Journal of Communication*, the authors discussed – and deplored – the lack of media and communication studies on the topic of inequality. The issue editors claimed that two fields of knowledge or "culture" production have neglected the issue of growing economic inequality over recent decades:

the professional field of journalism practices and news media on the one hand, and the most relevant areas of the academic field on the other, including (not least) the communication, journalism, and media studies discipline, and economics and other relevant social science disciplines. (Preston & Grisold, 2017: 4258)

This negligence is unjustified for at least two reasons. The first reason is that inequality in obtaining information puts the institution of democracy at risk. Here, Golding pointed to the close relation between economic welfare and informed citizenship and argues that:

(...) sufficiently informed citizen needs to seek and obtain rather more than is routinely provided if she or he is to fulfill the ideals of engagement and deliberation implicit in the full notion of citizenship. The problem is that such a task is impeded, in a period in which disposable incomes and wealth are so unequal, if the information required is only, or significantly, available at a price. (Golding, 2017: 4312)

Citizenship, he continues, "diligently seeking to acquire the necessary resources for active engagement and judgment as a participating member of society, is hindered by the cost involved in so doing" (ibid.: 4313). These factors result in *citizen detriment*, which becomes "an ineluctable feature of the communication ecology in a society riven by deep and widening inequality" (ibid.: 4317). The cost of acquiring information is just one element along the line of functioning as democratic citizens. Another element, which follows it at least partly, is *civic disengagement*. When discussing inequality in the information society, Johannes M. Bauer (2016: 1) associated high levels of inequality with "lower civic disengagement and the rise of populist movements with considerable potential for political unrest and strife".

The second reason for the negligence of inequalities in media and communication studies being unjustified, is the significant role that the media and journalism have in shaping our culture. In the introduction to their reader *Social inequalities, media, and communication*, Toks Oyedemi and Jan Servaes (2016: xxix) argued that imbalances and inequalities in the media have negative implications for global and local cultures.

Despite the rather scattered and undertheorized media and communication research on inequality, evidence of inequality abounds both in the scholarly literature

and in practice. Seen through the prism of inequality, a long and rich tradition becomes visible that can be structured analytically along two axes. One is the segmentation of the field into macro, meso and micro levels, whereby policy and technology are located at the macro level, media companies and professional journalism represent the meso level and media and communication use as well as content constitute the micro level. The second axe of analysis draws a (blurred) line between traditional legacy media, composed of linear broadcasting (radio and television), printed press (newspapers and magazines), films for movie theatres and so on, and digital media, basically defined by distribution over the internet. Both traditional legacy and digital media and communications follow rules and patterns of governance and regulation, that is, different *regimes*. These regimes constitute the second axe of analysis.

Table 1. Media and communication equalities and inequalities

		Macro level (policy and technology)	Meso level (business and profession)	Micro level (content and use)
Traditional regime	Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> public service broadcasting universal services media subsidies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cooperative national news agencies affordable press and broadcasting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> low price and non-discriminatory information and entertainment access “television for all” ubiquitous terrestrial broadcasting
	Inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cultural imperialism “old” world information and communications flow of information to and from developing countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> media concentration national/regional monopolies commercialization global news agencies economic market entry barriers gender gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> news bias knowledge gaps “propaganda model” (news) representation
Digital regime	Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> net neutrality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> low-cost online start-ups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blogs, Web 2.0 easy access to society-wide participation
	Inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> protectionist policies (“safe harbour”, tax breaks) capacity and frequency (mobile) allocation for networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “one per cent economy” “winner-takes-it-all economy” global monopolies gender gaps low-paying jobs, unemployment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> digital divides surveillance algorithmic filtering misinformation and fake news big data, data protection intransparent digital searches news representation social scoring by “social media”

The combination of the two axes results in a matrix (shown in Table 1) used for analytical purposes. The fields of the matrix do not, however, have clear-cut boundaries but

rather overlap and influence one another. Nonetheless, these axes allow for the analysis of the ongoing longitudinal development of media change from analogue to digital and for the identification of long-lasting patterns of inequality across time and technology.

Equalities and inequalities in legacy media (the traditional regime)

Denis McQuail (this volume, chapter 2) outlined the history and genesis of the normative value of equality in the *traditional regime* in respect of publication and the media. In doing so, he highlighted ownership, literacy, news flow, representation and the distribution of knowledge as the main strands (and contested areas) of media equality research.

At the micro level, McQuail insists, traditional media, in particular television, have served – and are serving – society well. Information and entertainment under the traditional regime are ubiquitously available to all citizens at a low cost. These services are hence available with no or low barriers to access.

Mass media content, however, has of course been criticized for what has become known as “news bias” (Bennett, 2016; Schiffer, 2018). This decade-long research tradition experiences a vibrant revival under the heading of misinformation and “fake news” with regard to “mainstream media”. News bias, understood as “distorting reality, giving a negative picture of minority groups of many kinds, neglecting or misconstruing the role of women in society, or differentially favoring a particular political party” (McQuail, 2010: 357), creates inequality as it affects capabilities and contributes to exclusion. McQuail illustrates this by collecting news content statements, showing that news media over-represent the social “top”, concentrate on nearer, richer and more powerful nations, have a patriotic and ethnocentric bias, give more attention and prominence to men than women, marginalize, stereotype or stigmatize ethnic minorities and immigrant groups, treat business leaders more favourably than unions and workers and neglect the poor (ibid.: 358).

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky expressed another strand of traditional media inequality critique in *Manufacturing consent* (1994 [1988]). The media, following their argument, serve the ends of a dominant elite.

A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public. (ibid.: 2)

In addition to Herman and Chomsky’s focus on wealth and power, the commercial character of traditional media is considered to be another source of media inequality. McManus (2009) argues that editorial decisions on which events become news are biased

by commercial considerations rather than by the interest and preferences of readers and viewers. Media coverage serves the anticipated interests of affluent consumers with a high disposable income rather than those of the majority. Therefore, considerable shares of the citizens are not at all or not well represented by traditional media.

A third source of inequality at the micro level is the proclaimed “knowledge gap”. This gap originates from different uses of the media, resulting in unequal knowledge bases of people, which create unequal life chances. This argument from the 1970s states that persons with higher education and social status profit more from media use than those in less privileged positions. Later research demonstrated that there are ceiling effects whereby the well informed are not able to increase their knowledge any further (Bonfadelli, 2002). Furthermore, prior knowledge, motivation and the structure of the media system are moderating factors.

At the traditional regime’s meso level are media companies considered to provide news and entertainment services at affordable prices for readers and viewers. Their prevailing business model includes internal cross-subsidies from the advertising department to the editorial newsroom. This business model, however, is currently challenged by an enormous shift of advertising revenues from linear television and the press to internet-based platforms, such as Google and Facebook. Furthermore, some traditional news media decided to create cooperatives for their constant news supply. These are still considered to be non-biased, due to their heterogeneous ownership structure (national news agencies, such as the Austrian Press Agency (APA), Italian ANSA, Portuguese LUSA, Swedish TT, Swiss SDA, etc., but also the US American cooperative Associated Press (AP)).

The flip side of media cooperation is an increase in media ownership concentration. Such concentration has been criticized for its power and capacity to influence politics and public opinion (Cunningham et al., 2015), for endangering the plurality of sources and the diversity of content (Iosifidis, 2014: 474), for limiting the range of voices (Hardy, 2014: 104), for creating barriers to market entry for new competitors (Doyle, 2013) and, finally, for constituting a burden for democracy (Meier, 2007). All these factors create inequalities among news companies and foster hierarchization and exclusion. Media concentration also fulfils Baldus’s criteria of participation in a collaborative project (creating and defining media landscapes) and of further accumulation of strategic resources, such as the exploitation of advertising revenues.

Another form of inequality at the meso level of the traditional regime is gender inequality within media organizations. “Glass ceilings” and “invisible barriers” have been well documented for over three decades (see, for example, NORDICOM, 2018; UNESCO, 1987). Further details and arguments are presented by Claudia Padovani, Karin Raeymeaekers and Sara de Vuyst in their chapter 10 on gender inequalities in this volume.

At the macro level of the traditional regime, public service broadcasting stands out as an equalizing force. Public service broadcasting was established in almost all countries of Western Europe (with the notable exception of Luxemburg) at the latest

after the Second World War and currently exists across the entire continent. Through its universality of availability and appeal, its dedication to giving access and voice to minorities and its commitment to the education of the public (Tracey, 1998: 26ff), public broadcasting has substantially contributed – and still does – to more media equality in society. Further, beyond broadcasting, the governance principle of universal service in the field of telecommunications has equally contributed to providing a densely knit grid of cable and mobile networks, available to all at an equal cost.

Policy instruments to create, foster or maintain media equality are more controversial than universal services. Nonetheless, most European countries have decided to support their media industry by means of indirect subsidies, such as tax breaks (e.g. VAT), or reduced tariffs for newspaper transport and telecommunication connections (Trappel, 2018). Others have taken even further steps by supporting their media industry under defined conditions by providing direct state subsidies. Such support is contested, as some have argued that it would compromise editorial independence instead of levelling the playing field of competitors. However, when designed properly and at arm's length from the government, subsidies might help, at least temporarily, to balance some of the negative effects of media ownership concentration and commercialization on media equality (Trappel, 2015).

At the transnational and global macro level, traditional media regimes have been heavily criticized for constantly creating inequalities. A strong and influential line of contestation was tabled in the MacBride report (1980), following up the so-called UNESCO Media Declaration (1978). Both documents pointed to the unequal flow of information between the global North and the global South as well as within these spheres (Nordenstreng & Hannikainen, 1984). Article VI of the UNESCO Declaration advocates more balanced information and communications:

For the establishment of a new equilibrium and greater reciprocity in the flow of information, which will be conducive to the institution of a just and lasting peace and to the economic and political independence of the developing countries, it is necessary to correct the inequalities in the flow of information to and from developing countries, and between those countries. To this end, it is essential that their mass media should have conditions and resources enabling them to gain strength and expand, and to co-operate both among themselves and with the mass media in developed countries. (UNESCO, 1978, Article VI)

These activities by UNESCO prompted the United States (in 1984) and the United Kingdom (in 1985) to withdraw from this UN organization. It took them more than ten (the UK in 1997) and almost twenty (the US in 2003) years to rejoin UNESCO. The debate, however, did not cease. Under the heading of “cultural imperialism” (Mattelart & Chanan, 1979; Tomlinson, 1991), the topic of unequal relations between the West and the developing countries returned and survived. David Hesmondhalgh (2007: 214) refers to cultural imperialism as “the way that the cultures of less developed countries have been affected by flows of cultural texts, forms and technologies associated with

‘the West’”. The concept of cultural imperialism has been contested and juxtaposed in the critical debate following the trend of globalization. “There is no question that the concept of globalization has replaced the imperialism paradigm as the main way of thinking about the international media” (Sparks, 2007: 126). Whichever terminology is used, media inequality between nations and cultures appears as the bottom line of the traditional regime.

Equalities and inequalities in internet-distributed media (the digital regime)

Along with other factors, digitalization has changed the ways in which the media function – in content production, in editing, in dissemination/distribution and in reception/using the media. At the micro level, what has become known as Web 2.0 (blogs, postings in online media, online fora, wikis, etc.) (Gillmor, 2004) has vastly expanded people’s opportunities to express themselves in public and increased communication equality by providing technical resources for participation. Social network sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and many more, have added another layer to communication, connecting private personal communication and public communication by creating many shades between them. For political communication (see also Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and Ralph Negrine, this volume, chapter 5), Twitter has gained superiority over other platforms, particularly since the US President Donald Trump chose to use this platform as his every-day, direct communication line to the American people.

However, the early enthusiasm about the potential of SNSs to foster and enhance social and political participation has diminished considerably over time. In its early days, the internet was expected to activate citizens to participate in the democratic discourse, thereby reducing inequality by giving voice to the silent. Furthermore, new sources of information would liberate public information from its gatekeepers by providing unlimited sources of political communication: “if there are no gates, there can be no gatekeepers” (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2000: 62). However, it turned out that the gates did not disappear. In his critical reading of digital democracy, Matthew Hindman (2009) worked out that the infrastructure and design of the internet do not allow for many gains in democratic participation.

Most online content receives no links, attracts no eyeballs, and has minimal political relevance. Again and again, this study finds powerful hierarchies shaping a medium that continues to be celebrated for its openness. This hierarchy is structural, woven into the hyperlinks that make up the Web; it is economic, in the dominance of companies like Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft; and it is social, in the small group of white, highly educated, male professionals who are vastly overrepresented in online opinion. (Hindman, 2009: 18f)

Hindman insisted that the internet might have opened new opportunities for people to express themselves but that there are strong mechanisms that by default (such as the link structure of the internet) make it difficult for single voices to be heard. He concluded his book by affirming: “It may be easy to speak in cyberspace, but it remains difficult to be heard” (ibid.: 142).

Another source of digital inequality at the micro level is the various forms of digital divides, which have been analysed extensively (see also Elena Vartanova and Anna Gladkova, this volume, chapter 12). Digital divide researchers “seek an understanding of relationships between the spread of digital technologies and the factors contributing to the inclusion or exclusion of countries, regions and people in the digitally mediated world” (Mansell, 2017: 148). According to various research traditions, digital divides can create inequalities through access to connectivity (first level), through skills and competencies (second level) and through what users can achieve in their lives when they are well connected (third level) (ibid.: 149; Ragnedda, 2017). Only if all these levels are addressed can people develop their capabilities in the digital communication realm. However, the use of the internet differs widely between users. In a report on the future of news for the BBC, James Harding (2015: 8) concludes that “[i]t is an age of growing information inequality. The world is dividing into those who seek the news and a growing number who skim it. Those searching, those who expect to be found, those who don’t want to know.” Such user patterns are similar to those found by the “knowledge gap” research tradition and nurture the assumption that previous social inequalities “reinforce and exacerbate pre-existing social inequalities” (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2016: 29). These two authors further concluded that social inequalities are the root of digital inequalities and that there is a recurring cycle between the two (ibid.: 30).

In her analysis of the neo-liberal order in media and communications, Natalie Fenton (2016: 2) accuses the traditional media of serving hegemonic interests, thwarting participatory democracy and legitimizing social inequality. However, this inequality did not evaporate with the age of the internet. To the contrary: “We are faced with astounding and increasing inequality” (ibid.: 13), as rich nations enjoy far more internet usage than poorer nations, and, in the UK, “almost all of the wealthiest people use the internet, while this falls to 58 per cent among the lowest income group” (ibid.: 14).

Digital divides exceed the dimension of information inequality and expand more generally to affect life chances. Given the huge variety of application-based services to master the challenges of daily life, those who are not well connected are likely to be distanced and excluded. “Those who function better in the digital realm and participate more fully in digitally mediated social life enjoy advantages over their digitally disadvantaged counterparts (...)” (Robinson et al., 2015: 570). This might be painful in terms of consumption when purchasing goods and services is cheaper and easier online than offline. More importantly, though, such exclusion reinvigorates the gender gaps that existed (and still exist) in the analogue world. “Recent evidence suggests that digital inequalities intersect with gender in two primary ways: (1) through the

gendering of skills and content production patterns and (2) through gendered labour market processes associated with jobs involving technology” (ibid.: 572).

Gender inequality in media and communication organizations has survived the digital transformation. A snapshot of leading figures in the digital communication industry reveals the following gender picture (see Table 2). One of the very rare female leaders was Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo! from 2012 to 2017.

Table 2. Gender glass ceiling in selected world-leading digital communication companies

Company	Leading figures, CEO	Sex
Alphabet	Sundar Pichai	Male
Amazon	Jeff Bezos	Male
Apple	Tim Cooks	Male
Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram	Mark Zuckerberg	Male
Google (Alphabet)	Larry Page, Sergey Brin	Male
Microsoft	Satya Narayana Nadella	Male
Netflix	Reed Hastings, Marc Randolph	Male
Snapchat	Evan Spiegel	Male
Twitter	Jack Dorsey	Male
Youtube (Alphabet)	Susan Wojcicki	Female

Source: Company information (2018, April).

Over and above the well-known and familiar forms of inequality in access, skills, outcomes, life chances and gender, new information and communication technologies are creating new varieties of social cleavages with the potential to create new inequalities. The use of two technologies stands out: algorithms and surveillance technologies.

Algorithms are embedded in countless digital services, from search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.) and the social scoring of users (practised extensively in China) to the feeds of so-called social media (Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, etc.). Marketed as beneficial for users wishing to avoid, for example, irrelevant advertising or find the right job or partner, algorithms tend to “perpetuate our existing social stratification, with all its injustices” (O’Neil, 2016: 70). Algorithms are also designed to learn from the past and to predict people’s future behaviour by creating virtual representations. Therefore, Cathy O’Neil convincingly argues that, in most cases, algorithms increase asymmetries and inequalities. On the one hand, algorithm-based advertising creates powerful campaigns, but, on the other, it “fuels their predatory cousins: ads that pinpoint people in great need and sell them fake or overpriced promises. They find inequality and feast on it” (ibid.). Another, more worrying, example is how algorithms of various kinds create vicious feedback loops: “The problem is that they’re feeding on each other. Poor people are more likely to have bad credit and live in high-crime

neighbourhoods, surrounded by other poor people” (ibid.: 199). Algorithms are backward oriented, not open to change and do not allow for creativity. O’Neil concludes “Big Data processes codify the past and do not invent the future” (ibid.: 204).

Surveillance technologies can be seen and understood as another breed of algorithmic filtering and selection (Just & Latzer, 2018; Latzer et al., 2016). Vincent Mosco (2017) sketches a post-internet society along three parameters: cloud computing, big data and the internet of things (IoT). He defines the latter as “a system for measuring, monitoring, and controlling the activity of objects and living organisms through sensors that gather, process, and report data over networks, including the Internet” (Mosco, 2017: 39). The inequality lies in the huge power imbalance between those who surveil and those who are surveilled. In most cases, citizens are not asked for their consent to be surveilled, irrespective of whether such surveillance is legal or illegitimate.

Mosco’s second parameter, big data, also related to algorithmic selection, is mainly relevant at the meso level in the context of digital inequalities. In the best case, big data allow companies to operate more efficiently, producing goods and services that meet the demand and avoid waste and misallocation, because the preferences of consumers are better known and more transparent. However, there are considerable risks attached to economies based on big data. “The fundamental problem is the reliance on data and machine learning and the lack of diversity of data and algorithms. These make them particularly vulnerable to troubling concentration as well as system failure” (Mayer-Schönberger & Ramge, 2018: 12).

Big data are not the only concern with regard to the digital media and communication economy. Across the board of scholarly writing, the “internetisation” (Hardy, 2014: 14) of mass media is considered to pose a major threat to diversity and journalistic independence that promotes the emergence of global oligopolies or monopolies – all affecting social equality. Once again, early expectations of what the internet would deliver in terms of diversity appear to have been in considerable contrast to the reality twenty years later. For example, Nicholas Negroponte (1995: 57) expected powerful media conglomerates to disappear: “(...) the monolithic empires of mass media are dissolving into an array of cottage industries”. However, he did not foresee that, out of these “cottage industries”, new and even more powerful global companies would emerge. At the same time, the mass media empires are still at work. In the preface to his book *The internet is not the answer*, Andrew Keen stipulates:

The more we use the contemporary digital network, the less economic value it is bringing to us. Rather than promoting economic fairness, it is a central reason for the growing gulf between rich and poor and the hollowing out of the middle class. Rather than making us wealthier, the distributed capitalism of the new networked economy is making most of us poorer. Rather than generating more jobs, this digital disruption is a principal cause of our structural unemployment crisis. Rather than creating more competition, it has created immensely powerful new monopolists like Google and Amazon. (Keen, 2015: ix–x)

According to Keen, media internetization results in a winner-takes-it-all economy, in which “profits are being made by a tiny group of increasingly monopolistic Internet companies” (ibid.: 142). Jonathan Hardy (2014: 128) highlighted the network character of the internet media economy as an important reason for this winner-takes-it-all pattern. In conjunction with strong effects of scale and scope economies, a handful of dominating media conglomerates have emerged, creating unprecedented global oligopolies. Such concentration creates inequality between media companies but also between nations.

The dominance of American Next Internet companies makes it very difficult for most nations, with the possible exception of China, to develop independent information systems that can consistently avoid American corporate filters and, particularly, their interest in maximizing profit through commercialism and the commodification of personal identity. (Mosco, 2017: 130)

Robert McChesney (2013: 130) states that the internet “has become one of the greatest generators of monopoly in economic history”. McChesney continues by asserting that “The grand irony of the internet is that what was once regarded as an agent for diversity, choice and competition has become an engine of monopoly” (ibid.: 191).

What, then, have been the reasons for allowing a few companies to become so powerful on a global scale? At the macro level, a few policy decisions in the United States have essentially been responsible for promoting communication monopolies. Taplin (2017: 80) refers to the *Internet Tax Freedom Act*, signed by President Bill Clinton in 1998, which prevents any government body from imposing internet-specific taxes. This tax break enabled the internet start-ups of that time to grow fast, privileging them over their competitors from the analogue world. The second policy decision, which still supports internet media companies, was the “safe harbour” provision of the *Digital Millennium Copyright Act*, also signed by Bill Clinton in 1998, which protects internet companies from copyright infringement prosecution, provided that they had no knowledge of and gained no financial benefit from the copyright violation (ibid.: 254). This provision has gained relevance over the years, not least with the heated debate on misinformation and “fake news” distributed over the internet by global platforms. Mosco (2017: 194) calls for the removal of the “safe harbour”, while others recall the history of the US Supreme Court and boldly suggest breaking up monopolies: “It is time to break up Google. The problem is simple: the company is just too powerful, as are Apple and many other big tech groups” (Sennett, 2013).

Another source of inequality at the macro level is the recurring issue of capacity distribution for terrestrial transmission. The digital promise has been to radically abandon shortages of capacity and to use the terrestrial spectrum more efficiently. In other words, policy interventions favouring one company over another by allocating bandwidth of the useable spectrum should be history. It has turned out, however, that spectrum shortages are returning with the spectacular growth of mobile communication. Frequencies are short again, and digital terrestrial broadcasting (radio and televi-

sion) are challenged for their bandwidth by mobile communication operators. While terrestrial broadcasting is available for all, mobile communication discriminates in price and quality. Some rural areas are served with low-capacity mobile infrastructure or receive no service at all, while urban areas benefit from a high-capacity network infrastructure.

Policy answers

While a few rather stable building blocks can be identified in the traditional regime, the digital regime is much more fluid and elusive in media policy terms. If media policy is understood as “the development of goals and norms leading to the creation of instruments that are designed to shape the structure and behaviour of media systems” (Freedman, 2008: 14), the essential norm of the traditional regime has been diversity and the public interest and the dominant instrument public service broadcasting or universal services in general. In the digital regime, neither norms nor instruments can be clearly noticed. Rather, the digital regime seems to be out of hand for policy altogether, due to the transnational and even global nature of the services provided by the dominant media and communication companies. Nonetheless, a few available policy items stand out at all three levels discussed earlier.

At the micro level, digital divides are addressed by various policy initiatives – any serious media policy initiative addresses access as well as training and learning (“media literacy”). Bauer (2016: 28), however, pinpointed a fundamental policy dilemma of connectivity and inequality: “On the one hand, policy-makers ought to facilitate the deployment and adoption of (advanced) communications to avoid the serious disadvantages associated with limited connectivity. On the other hand, increased connectivity aggravates the inequality-increasing dynamics associated with the digital economy.”

Despite such objections, connectivity seems to be the norm in the digital regime, irrespective of its consequences for equality. Furthermore, policy in the past has often focused exclusively on the first level of the digital divide, assuming that connected citizens would automatically profit from having access to the internet. In this respect, the European Commission’s *A digital agenda for Europe* (2010) has been criticized for overemphasizing the supply side and neglecting the “difficulty of bringing stakeholders with commercial interests in the market, networks and service designers and innovators, consumers, and representatives of the state and other civil society interest groups into a dialogue that might start to address incommensurable value” (Mansell, 2014: 213).

Among the media policy instruments of the digital regime, a cornerstone is – or rather has been in the US – the provision of net neutrality, allowing all internet traffic to be transported with the same speed and priority and without discrimination. While the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) decided to abandon net neutrality in December 2017 (taking effect in June 2018), to make the internet “better, faster and

cheaper” and to remove unnecessary regulations to promote investments in broadband (Federal Communications Commission (FCC), 2018), the European legislation confirmed – in principle, with notable exceptions – net neutrality as a policy directive (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2015). While the underlying norm of internet freedom might be shared by all actors, the instruments of its political protection differ widely. For some, it equals the freedom of internet companies to ensure priority for their business. For others, it is rather the freedom of users to receive and impart information without discrimination.

In Europe, the traditional media policy instrument of public service broadcasting safeguarding equality is up for renewal. In its *Vision 2020*, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), representing public service broadcasters all over Europe and beyond, indicates that its members “must reinvent PSM, in the sense that we translate the values and the remit to inform, educate and entertain, within the new context of a networked society” (European Broadcasting Union (EBU), 2014: 11). PSM stands for “public service media,” extending the operation mandate from radio and television to online and the internet. Indeed, public service media continue to fulfil many of the equality requirements in the digital regime, and their remit should be taken forward across the digital boundary (Trappel, 2016).

There are, of course, many more areas of policy trying to safeguard and extend equality in society, among them strong measures controlling further expansion of media power by global platforms and intermediaries, limiting media concentration at the national level, holding platforms to account for pernicious content and protecting privacy against big data and algorithmic selection. Some of these policies are addressed in this volume; for example, chapter 16 by Werner A. Meier profoundly addresses the governance of digital divides.

Over and above these fields of media policy in the digital regime, equality – like democracy and other civic values – constantly needs to be defended. It is necessary to remember that:

(...) inequality is not the inevitable by-product of technology and globalization (...):
It is the direct result of the fact that since the rise of the Internet, policy makers have acted as if the rules that apply to the rest of the economy do not apply to Internet monopolies. (Taplin, 2017: 9)

Conclusions

This brief *tour d’horizon* through several decades of media inequality and policy research suggests that we are travelling from old to new forms of communication inequalities. Many forms of inequality have survived the transition from the traditional to the digital regime (e.g. ownership concentration, control of a very few companies over large numbers of customers, gender gaps and knowledge gaps), and some have

diminished or decreased in importance along the way (access to information and voice). In the digital regime, some types of inequality are aggravated (e.g. power shared by an extremely small number of actors worldwide), while some are new (algorithmic filtering and selection, big data, surveillance and social scoring). Similar to the economic inequality discussed above, increasing inequality in the media risks endangering social cohesion, creating exclusion and distancing.

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Chapter 2

Equality – an ambiguous value

Denis McQuail

In his chapter Denis McQuail departs from two dominant narratives of public communication, technology and human agency. While the first seems to be running ahead of purpose, the latter follows the ideal and goal of freedom. However, freedom and equality are ambiguous values, and may contradict one another. McQuail identifies a stream of inequalities along the road of public communication, from claims of cultural imperialism, ethnic and gender inequalities to knowledge gaps. He emphasizes the close relationship between equality, objectivity and truth. With regard to the public interest in media equality, he reminds us that media comprise cultural and material goods in themselves, and their distribution reflects divisions and inequalities in society. His conclusion is rather sober: Technologies enable voice, but not large audiences, and they turn every open communication space into a commercial opportunity. What remains necessary is public communication that has qualities of transparency, non-exploitation, reliability, diversity and relevance. (abstract written by the editor)

The concept of equality in respect of publication and media does not appear until quite recent times in any explicit sense, but rather as a corollary and extension of other ideas, especially that of freedom. The history of public communication can be written according to differing themes. One is the story of communication technology, enabling the production, dissemination and storage of all forms of expression (facts, ideas, art, religion and more) to increase at an exponential rate. More and more varied voices came to be heard and more people were reached. These remarks apply to the era of printing that lasted until the start of the twentieth century.

An alternative narrative tells of the human agency behind these developments – a story of successive claims to the right to publish in conflict, if need be, with religious and political forces of orthodoxy seeking to control and limit the means of publication. The story tells of a gradual extension of rights and possibilities in tandem with the extension of political rights in democratic forms of government. The leitmotiv is the ideal and goal of freedom, in all its aspects and for all – communities and nations as well as individuals. This can be seen in simple terms as a matter of increasing equality,

McQuail, Denis (2019). Equality – an ambiguous value in Josef Trappel (ed.) *Digital media inequalities: Policies against divides, distrust and discrimination*, pp. 31-41. Göteborg: Nordicom.

despite differences of power, status and resources. It can also be seen as a reduction of inequality, but without fundamental change.

The essential nature of the equality at issue is not made explicit in either of these narratives, which probably reflects conventional ideas about progress and democracy current in the modern era. The expansion of publication possibilities increased the chance for all would-be voices to be heard and established communication access as a right of all citizens. The explosion of publication, coupled with other social changes, also made the output of print media available in diverse forms to all, thus providing greater equality of reception and more equal sharing in the benefits of communication, for whatever purpose. In the freedom narrative, the idea of equality was a powerful motivating force behind the removal of restrictions on publication and economic burdens that mainly affected the poorer classes.

New ideas about democracy and the sovereignty of the people entailed the belief that citizens should be free to form and express opinions, and for this there needed to be relevant information widely available to all. In a democratic society, there should be no privileged access to the means of public communication and barriers to participation for audiences should be removed, especially illiteracy and low levels of education.

The introduction of new (mass) media in the last century, especially those of film, radio and television, added a new dimension to the debate about freedom and democracy. For a start, the new media were (as a matter of public policy) not available to individuals in any practical sense. They typically involved large complex organizations, much capital financing and were far from equally available to different political or social movements or schools of thought. For the most part they were run according to market principles, which give no priority to freedom or equality, except in the sense that mass distribution created a certain equality amongst a large audience – a homogeneity of current ideas and information and cultural uniformity. The new popular press sought and obtained dissemination amongst a majority. Broadcasting, whether as radio or television, even more effectively reached most citizens with news and entertainment.

The resulting “mass society” of the early twentieth century, as characterised by C.W. Mills (1956), was in some sense a more equal, that is, undifferentiated society, whether desirable or not. This points to some of the ambiguities and inner tensions of the concept (discussed again below). The norm of equality is open to different interpretations. The ideal of press freedom brought equality in its train, but the pursuit of equality could entail diminished freedom for some as it can involve levelling down as well as levelling up. In addition, it implicitly values similarity over diversity, which has also been seen as an ideal to be pursued in publication.

The late stages of the era of “industrial media” (mass press and broadcasting) in the latter twentieth century, saw much attention given to the rise of new and influential systems of public communication. Although the predominant aim of most interventions by political authorities were in the direction of control and limitation of influence, the climate of the time was favourable to more reformist and public spirited efforts

to reduce the potential harm of mass media and stimulate the potential social and cultural benefits. This climate helped to stimulate and shape the efforts of research drawn to study this new social phenomenon.

Main strands of media equality research

Many strands of this research were guided by one or another form of attachment to the value of equality. Amongst the first such, arising out of the politics of the time, was a concern with the consequences of an emerging monopoly structure of the press, especially in the early home of much communication research, the USA. It was the wealthy and well connected that owned the press and directed its opinion-forming role, meaning a very unequal balance of access for other interests in society. It did not take much research to establish the extent of monopoly, but it was less easy to demonstrate how this resulted in the effects feared by critics. Some distorting effects of ownership on content could be demonstrated, but the next stage of effect, on public opinion, was more elusive.

A quite different early theme of research was into literacy, a key factor in creating a large audience equally able to receive and process diverse information and enjoy the culture of their society. This topic was initially pursued as a problem for mass education in developed societies, but after WWII there was a notable opening up of studies of development in the non-industrial world, with a strong emphasis on the role of communication in transmitting the many “messages for development”. This was not only a matter of teaching new techniques for agriculture, but also of trying to transmit the values and practices of democracy. The central aim of the early phase of development research was primarily concerned with “levelling up” and reducing the vast differences of wealth, power and quality of life of “traditional” societies.

One feature of this enterprise was the attention given to the flow of news across frontiers (and also within frontiers). At first this was a matter of inventarising the great inequalities in the flow of news internationally. The international news agencies were in the hands of a few powerful nations and they saw as their task to inform their own publics according to national interests and relevance. The surplus could be sold off at low prices to any foreign media operator. Such news was essentially second hand and of less value for purpose. News of foreign parts reaching metropolitan audiences was typically fragmentary and distorted.

The overall result was characterised as one of stark imbalance of flow and as a reinforcement of a dependent relationship. The media publics (very limited in extent) of the “Third World” received little news of relevance to their own circumstances and the richer nations in their turn received very limited news about the Developing World and what there was, was distorted or unbalanced in various ways, often negative and stereotyped. An added feature of the time and of research was the imbalance of flow between the Soviet bloc and the “West”, with negativity and stereotyping also much in evidence. This whole complex was treated as an issue of inequality and became very

contentious, culminating in the UNESCO Media Declaration of 1978. The central problem was that the main proposals for ameliorating the situation would involve restrictions on western journalists and some forms of censorship.

Research and theory into international communication was driven largely by critical theory and the value of equality was central in this project. The term “cultural imperialism”, coined in the 1970s, was key to the critical ideas of the time, in which the subordination of voices of poorer countries was not just a problem of slow development but represented the suppression of dissent and delegitimisation of opposition to economic domination.

The main focus was on news and information, but there was also the larger question of the right of small countries and regions to maintain their language and culture, threatened by competition with cheap and popular (mainly American) products. In the international television market, there was not much place for content that did not follow the American popular entertainment model or matched its low prices, even when locally produced. In that way, essential economic conditions and historical subordination hindered any true equality of opportunity. This particular debate was taken up in Europe following the development of cable and satellite television. Conditions for resisting Americanisation (or *Dallasification*, as sometimes called) were more favourable. Within Europe itself there was a call for protection and support for minority and regional cultures and those of small nations with big neighbours in order to redress the balance. Problems of this nature had been accentuated by the arrival of satellite broadcasting in the late 1970s and then cable and satellite technologies, which threatened the sovereignty of states in respect of communication.

The differential representation of national and ethnic media content had been a very early concern of researchers, especially in the US. Research generally confirmed the suspicion that different groups were not treated equally or fairly. Such concerns were later widely taken up in research on the portrayal of ethnic groups in popular media content. The key norm deployed was one which upheld the right of such groups to suffer no discrimination, compared to a majority population. Normative theory in this area supported a dual expectation: no negativity or invisibility and also the opportunity for minorities to have their own means of self-expression where possible. The attainment of media equality in these terms can be seen as a very challenging goal; an impractical ideal. A similar version of the same theory and research was addressed to the questions of gender. Research had long confirmed that women had been found to be treated as inferiors to male protagonists or just as invisible (especially in news), although what would count as equality was problematic since the reality of most societies has involved discrimination against women. Behind much critical research in this area was a view that more positive and varied representation of women in the media would promote more real life equality.

Another question that occupied research and theory about media from an early point was that of media effects on the distribution of “knowledge”. It was clear that in all societies, knowledge of all kinds is unequally distributed as a result of varied levels

of education, social conditions and, possibly, the variable status of knowledge itself. It was also a positive expectation of mass media when they arrived, that they could raise the general level of knowledge and reduce the differences indicated. Apart from the general question of whether this was happening, there was an interest in assessing the relative success of different media, especially press and broadcasting, in this regard.

In the measurements applied, knowledge was generally defined as “serious” or “hard” information, in itself a form of bias that largely prejudged outcomes. The core phenomenon was defined as a systematic “knowledge gap” between the more and the less informed. Not surprisingly, audience attention to media information (e.g. the news) was indeed correlated with this gap, but there was little in the way of proof of direction of influence. The most that could be established was that press media were probably more informative than television, although this could have been reflecting the bias indicated in the definition of “knowledge” and that the benefits of newspapers were confined to the reading minority. Nevertheless, a preoccupation with inequalities of this kind persisted and re-appeared under the heading of the “digital divide”, referring to the very unequal distribution of access to online sources of information and other services. While basic access is now widespread, it is incomplete and of very varying quality. However, the notion of *equality* as a goal or standard has largely disappeared and the variations that exist seem beyond remedy.

Media news has been a perennial and fundamental object of research and theorising because of the close connection with public opinion and the central part that news has always played in the politics and everyday life of democratic societies. The concept of equality is central to thinking about news quality although the relationship is ambiguous. The key lies in the concept of truth as an absolute unique meaning attaching to information, even if the ideal is unachievable in practice. The truth is established on the basis of evidence collected in an objective/neutral manner, without preconceptions or special pleading. The obverse of truthful, accurate news, aside from misinformation or lies, is usually referred to as news bias, in which reports are slanted in one direction or another, whether on purpose or not. Reporting of news without bias calls for equal attention to all main participants in events and all relevant sources. The norm of equality, in this sense, does not require equal space or time to all events and objects, since it is modified by considerations of relevance and other factors. But the suspension of judgement and openness of mind required entails an assumption of equality. There is a close relationship between equality and objectivity, the foremost norm of journalism. Amongst other norms of journalism is the norm that it should not privilege the powerful, another manifestation of an outlook of equality.

Media equality as a normative concept

It is clear from this brief history of communication theory and research that the notion of equality has appeared under different forms and with varying degrees of centrality.

It is often used without any definition, treated as self-evident in meaning, merit and relevance. In general, greater equality is regarded as a valid measure of media content when questions of bias are at issue. The same applies to the matter of *access* to media, whether as source/sender or audience.

Several expressions of media equality can be distilled out of the corpus of work reviewed, as follows:

- equality of opportunity for individuals to make use of different media as source, although necessary conditions can include sufficient education and skill (e.g. literacy and “computer literacy”), money, certain kinds of “cultural capital”
- equal access to the means of communication, whether by way of large scale and organized methods or individual contact. The former relates primarily to the structures and control of mass communication
- equality of outcomes (e.g. learning effects) especially on some societal goals regarded as important, such as the capacity to act fully as citizens and participate in political decisions
- equality of representation in media of groups, minorities, nationalities, etc. This is usually understood as lack of discrimination, especially by negative stereotyping or invisibility. Equality also entails the capacity for minorities to directly control their own representation, either by having their own media outlets or having sufficient representation in the staff of the main mass media

This classification does not exhaust the complexities which make it hard to pin down this apparently simple concept. One explanation of this complexity lies in the variable relevance of equality to media activities, and its potential conflict with other values, especially freedom, cultural quality and diversity. On the first point, it is clear that the status of the value varies within quite a wide range: At one end it is treated as an absolute value to be attained as an end in itself at all costs and above other goals, a position that does not accord well with the primary purposes of public communication or with diversity.

By contrast, it can be seen as an optional feature or benefit. More likely, it has an intermediate status as a means to one particular end or as entailed by the pursuit of some more specific and overriding purpose, such as the functioning of democracy, the decrease of social inequality or the removal of discrimination in society. Often the concept of equality becomes the focus of attention when a particular issue of *inequality* is being addressed. This can arise in relation to the reach of mass media within a population, the quality of media service offered, or the availability of service to different groups, for instance different regions and localities. In the matter of ownership and control, there has always been great inequality in the real access for different sectors of society, in seeming contradiction of the promise of “press freedom”, sometimes justified by the priority attached to rights of private property.

In respect of the many and endemic inequalities in all aspects of media control, content and reception, a claim is rarely made for absolute equality. This is so, not only

for reasons of impracticality, but because the inequalities referred to often reflect the basic diversity of human societies and of media preferences and needs. What seems to be called for is some idea of “relative equality”, usually expressed in terms of “equality of opportunity” plus avoidance of clear discrimination that might have harmful consequences for powerless minorities, in particular. What is often missing, however, is any agreed standard by which an apparent inequality is unacceptable or even avoidable.

In respect of equality there is also a tension between a *positive* interpretation of the norm, which would involve active intervention to promote media equality in any of the ways mentioned and a *negative* version in which any intervention in the working of media is only justified where there is evidence of harmful inequality (such as racist representations or significant exclusion from media provision).

The relation of equality to the norm of diversity is also complex. On the one hand, equality can be seen as the maximisation of diversity where all have the same rights of access and treatment. On the other hand, diversity can be seen as requiring media access and content and reception to approximately mirror the actual diversity of society in respect of locality, ethnicity, preferences, etc. The powerful influence exerted by economic inequality, by way of the free market, is usually left out of this account.

The public interest in media equality

Although there are clearly going to be beneficiaries from the reduction of inequality in any of the ways mentioned, much of this might be accounted for in terms of increased access and choice for individual media “consumers”. The question of the larger public benefit is less easy to establish, since we are speaking mainly of social goods that are not easy to specify, but hypothesised in social and political theory. The case for there being a public interest is, nevertheless, a strong one, even if there are rather differing views of what this entails. From one point of view, a strong centralised state finds it more convenient for the exercise of its power to have a media system under its effective control that reaches the whole population effectively and more or less uniformly. This is not the situation in most modern democracies, but all media systems tend to defer to power and be available to support legitimate needs of authorities. There are varied reasons for this, including the dynamics of “news” which puts independent journalism at a disadvantage and encourages reliance on official sources. This “benefit” to society is not one that has motivated attempts at media reform but it has played a background role in some equalizing measures, including those relating to public broadcasting and provisions for universal access to broadcasting and telecommunications.

The theme of national unification or integration (both historically seen as public benefits, even necessities) also informs the aspiration for a shared national culture or sphere of linguistic and cultural influence. The media have been seen as key elements in the preservation (or destruction) of national cultures, promoting a widespread, therefore more equal, reach for national and regional media.

These foundations for seeking equality are essentially conservative, even reactionary, but there are democratic and progressive arguments too, based primarily on the requirements for full and effective citizenship. Citizens need to be widely and sufficiently informed on public issues of contemporary relevance and be able to follow and take part in society wide debates or conversations. The only way this is likely to occur is by way of mass media with reliable journalism and platforms for alternative views to be expressed. This is by now a mainstream and conventional view, despite efforts to counter it by attacks on journalists and pollution of the news by various methods and forms of propaganda.

Successive changes in communication technology have usually been followed by some public efforts to promote its development or to extend benefits to a larger share of the population. In the case of print publication this was expressed mainly in the removal of barriers set by public authorities themselves (censorship, licensing, tax, etc.). In the case of wireless telegraphy and telephony, efforts were more pro-active and motives mixed. The expected were first and foremost for the state (defence and administrative and economic efficiency). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, international competition in military and economic matters impelled development of new communications. The coming of broadcasting invited much more intrusive regulation which often had an equalising purpose and effect by controlling access and competition and ensuring wide coverage. Public broadcasting systems in Europe exemplified this most clearly, since they involved one way or another of allocating rights to transmission in ways acceptable to public authorities but also responsive to different public purposes, audience demands and arguably fair to most parties.

The most recent set of innovations, driven by computers and telecommunications have produced “new media” that is gradually taking over pre-existing ones. In the early stages there was public support and intervention for much of the same mixture of motives indicated. Perhaps the most significant, however, has been the economic industrial benefits, as the media acquire increasing significance in their own right as a branch of the economy. Equality does not play much part in industrial policy except where it relates to widening participation in the consumer market. Although the main economic benefits of globalization accrue to only a few countries there are a number of markets defined by geography, language, culture and economic level and all nations have an interest either in protecting or extending their own sphere of influence where possible.

Policies for increasing media equality in the public interest

It is worth recalling at this point, the extent to which media equality in whatever manifestation is nearly everywhere a secondary consideration. When equality is the central focus of attention, there is a temptation to forget the many endemic limitations

to the attainment of equality, however defined. Most basic is the fundamental social and economic inequality of societies, despite important variations and exceptions. This is caused by historic class and cultural differences that have not been abolished by advances in education and material welfare. The media comprise cultural and material goods in themselves and their distribution reflects the underlying divisions and inequalities of each society. These constraints cannot be overcome, or even reduced, in any short time span. It is also the case that media are continuously moving on and policies appropriate to one medium at one time can eventually become obsolete or even counter-productive. Nevertheless, the range and significance of public benefits, as just summarised, means that some interventions on behalf of equality are better than none.

The variety of forms of media (in)equality that exist is matched by a variety of instruments of policy. The main goals addressed have been:

- more equal access to the means of production and transmission;
- universal service and net neutrality;
- more equal representation in content;
- more equal distribution of reliable and relevant information amongst the public;
- more equal rights to autonomy in media matters for groups defined by culture, language or region, in resistance to hegemonic media influences;
- more equal access as audiences to diverse sources and forms of provision;
- more equal ability to have the communication equipment needed to enjoy the benefits now available to many but not all.

These goals are all complex, difficult to achieve and often slippery to pin down or define. Their pursuit also involves a struggle with political and economic realities that blunt the will to action and frustrate the attempts, never mind the obstinacy with which public policy often fails to match up to the aspirations of policy makers. It is important, but rarely possible, to find means that do not come against principled opposition on grounds of established rights, such as those of free expression and property rights.

The first goal, access to the means of production and distribution, is open to various kinds of policy intervention. A basic measure is anti-monopoly legislation which treats media as a special case and aims to limit monopoly trends (of its nature is non egalitarian). A more controversial means is to achieve equal access by way of subsidy in some form to alternative, minority, or failing media, although there is always a problem in the selection of beneficiaries on political or economic grounds. The outcome may not be more equality.

In the case of broadcasting (radio and television), the goal *can* be aided by licensing requirements that favour otherwise excluded groups, and also work against monopoly. Public broadcasting structures are the most likely to be successful in equalising access, by concentrating control over access in one body that typically has obligations to reflect

the communication needs of the whole public and is answerable for what it does. However, Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) was largely instituted in European countries for mixed reasons and under circumstances that no longer apply. An essential feature was that of public monopoly ownership and control, which is no longer acceptable.

Moreover, public service broadcasting applies to a means of communication in relative decline. However much it has been a key element in the advance and protection of the public interest in many countries, it is hard to see how PBS, under conditions of globalisation, can provide a model for the current spectrum of media. It offers many lessons for other kinds of independent public regulation of media. Public broadcasting structures have greatly varying competence, but, in the best case, they can and do enforce political neutrality and reduce partisan bias in public communication, as well as involve overall democratic control. These goals are very much influenced by ideas of social equality.

The second goal – equal representation in content- is very difficult to achieve by policy, except in the case of public broadcasting. This is not a small exception, but its effectiveness is decreasing. Apart from this, the only policy measures available involve restrictions on forms of discrimination that are illegal or clearly harmful for the public as a whole. Most success here depends on the normative inclination of the media themselves and their professional commitment to truth and fairness. Some influence can be exerted by press councils and similar bodies, but sanctions are likely to be weak.

Research has tended consistently to show that information levels vary according to education, social class and media use, with quite big differences between national societies. Public broadcasting seems to have been more successful than commercial systems at reducing such “knowledge gaps”, in line with one of its main objectives. However, cultural factors also play a large part and are largely beyond any positive manipulation. There are also many pressures that can be brought to bear on media to “raise their informative game”, including those from press councils, industry self-government and sometimes independent media regulators.

The goal of protecting the interests of minority media or minorities within a national media system can be tackled by several of the measures already mentioned, perhaps especially by subsidy to support national and regional culture and language.

The protection of a national media system, or parts of it, from overwhelming competition by a large neighbour or an “invasion” of foreign media content is more difficult, since this has usually been driven by overwhelming economic motives and the demands of media consumers. There has been a general tendency to cede control of communication borders and weaken media sovereignty. There has however also been resurgence by way of own national production aided by the intrinsic popularity of content that is culturally closer to home. In this area, protectionism is difficult in the context of international trade agreements.

The goal of expansion of audience reach for media of all kinds is probably the goal facing the least obstacles, since the forces of industry and market work towards it all the time, alongside public demand. At certain points, historically been policy support for

instance in the form of tax concessions to print media and favourable postal charges. The electronic media have benefitted a great deal from a broad policy of universal access applying to postal services, broadcasting and wireless.

Governments accept a responsibility for investing in infrastructure. The new electronic media in the 1980s received wide support and subsidy from the state, hopeful for long term economic and strategic benefit. However, this role was largely abandoned as impossible or unnecessary. Instead, it has been left to the overwhelming and seemingly successful efforts of the global electronic firms to drive the penetration of mobile and other consumer media. Despite this, it cannot be claimed that the “digital divide” has disappeared. It has however been replaced by a graded structure of possession of the latest technology and online content, governed by income differences.

In conclusion

This chapter has emphasised the complex and elusive nature of the concept of equality. It is particularly hard to pin down in relation to online media, beyond the (theoretical) fact of unlimited access for all and the policy of “net neutrality” that promises no discrimination as between “providers” in matters of control and regulation. The underlying trends of media today are profoundly unsettling and require re-examination of our normative goals and assumptions.

The promise of open access has been largely fulfilled, but without the hoped for benefits, for several reasons. On the one hand, the media use habits of the majority in industrial societies were already firmly established. The predominant media culture and typical life style does not favour taking advantage of new opportunities to communicate in the public sphere. There are many voices but not large audiences. On the other hand, the pressure to advance technology and to monetise innovations has distorted the potential that exists, turning every open communication space into a commercial opportunity for advertisers, or actively privatising personal communication.

What remains necessary yet steadily more elusive is the more equal distribution of public communication that has qualities of transparency, non-exploitation and reliability as well as diversity and relevance. Such a goal does not look attainable, except by structural provision, guaranteed by democratic control, itself equally unlikely. In the end we are back with the two narratives mentioned at the start; one the technological and the other a matter of human agency. Technology seems to be running ahead of purpose, strongly driven by global market forces.

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Chapter 3

Inequality, social trust and the media

Towards citizens' communication and information rights

Hannu Nieminen

We have entered times when increasing inequality feeds growing distrust in social and political institutions. Together, these two tendencies – diminishing equality and a lack of trust – create a challenge to liberal democracy. The media have a pivotal role in these developments. On the one hand, they are central to democracy; on the other, they are part of the process of normalizing inequality. In the media, the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots is the “new normal”. Our conclusion is that, as the legal and regulatory instruments on the nation state level can no longer guarantee citizens’ democratic rights to information and communications, this must be the task of the European Union. We propose a radical democratic reform of the EU’s media and communication policy that would take citizens’ democratic rights to information and communications as a starting point. We propose five policy areas that are pertinent to democratic rights to communications: access to information, the availability of information, media competence, dialogue and privacy.

It has become increasingly common for members of political and economic communities to warn about the dangers of increasing inequality and the threat that it poses to our societies. We hear these high-level warnings from, among others, the leaders of the World Economic Forum, the Munich Security Conference, the US National Intelligence Council and EU experts as well as from the Secretary General of the OECD (Bohemia, 2017; Munich Security Report (MCR), 2017; National Intelligence Council (NIC), 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017; World Economic Forum (WEF), 2017, 2018a).

Their fear is that the growing gap between the richer groups and the general population, joined with diminishing public trust across the world, will lead to increasing social and political instability. Some recent warning signs in the form of social and political polarization include the most recent US presidential election, Britain’s Brexit process, the results of parliamentary elections in many European countries (Austria in 2017, France in 2017 and Italy in 2018) and political developments in EU member countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Instability is seen as

threatening the basic fabric of democratic society; as the US National Intelligence Council has stated, “At the national level, the gap between popular expectations and government performance will grow; indeed, democracy itself can no longer be taken for granted” (NIC, 2017: 7).

The reason for concern is quite clear. The main sources, as well as the main targets, of popular discontent are political and economic elites, who are seen as being responsible for the rising inequality and the general feeling of unfairness. However, distrust is targeted not just at the elites but at public institutions more generally. One of the main institutions in this respect is the legacy media, which are perceived to be part of the overall social and political elite formation (Braw, 2014; Edelman Trust Barometer (ETB), 2017; Ipsos, 2017; Swift, 2016). As stated in a recent report by the Reuters Institute, based on the influential Edelman report on the development of trust at the global scale:

Reduced trust in journalism, whether found in legacy or social media, matters because of its role in supporting the democratic process and informing citizens so that they can make choices at elections and referendums, but also in holding the rich and powerful to account. (Newman & Fletcher, 2017: 7; see ETB, 2017)

Growing numbers of people in developed countries feel that they have been abandoned by the elites as well as by the legacy media (Nicolau & Giles, 2017; Ipsos, 2017; Swift, 2016). A central dimension of this development is that distrust in institutions is prevalent not only among less advantaged groups but also, increasingly, among the educated middle classes (Chauvel & Hartung, 2016; ETB, 2017; NIC, 2017; WEF, 2018b: 15). The radicalization of the middle classes facing uncertain futures and downward social mobility has introduced a new element to traditional political populism. Distrust in the elites is not just expressed in traditional forms – through political passivity, abstaining from voting or voting in protest. Anti-elite protests are channelled into more organized forms, in new right-wing parties as well as in left-radical movements. These organizations have the potential to challenge seriously the “old” parties, which are perceived as protecting the privileged elites. This tendency can be seen all over Europe, from Greece and Italy to Sweden and Norway and from Hungary and Slovakia to Germany, France and Britain. What is perhaps different from the earlier forms of popular discontent is the recruitment of the middle classes to populist politics that can supply anti-elitist criticism with a stronger voice at a bigger volume. The leaders of the new right-wing parties are also increasingly well connected and well trained for public performance, and they often either own or have an influence over major media outlets.

As a result of the increasing influence of right-wing political movements, some media groups have joined the new anti-elitist surge. These groups exploit popular discontent, depicting the legacy media as servants of an elite conspiracy against the discontented masses. This is evident in the United States, where Fox News is challenging the major metropolitan media, especially *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and CNN, but also in the United Kingdom, where the *Daily Mail* has refreshed its role

in challenging the “liberal” media – *The Guardian* and the BBC – from an extreme right-wing position. Similar developments can be observed in many other countries, a classic example being Silvio Berlusconi and the Fininvest media company that he and his family control.

From the viewpoint of the future of European democracy, the question is how we see the role of the media when popular trust continues to erode. The basic logic – and our problem – is briefly presented as follows:

- With rising inequality, general trust in social and political institutions has declined. According to those affected by recent developments, politics and social institutions only benefit the governing elites. The legacy media are seen to be part of the elite formation, and journalists are distrusted to the same degree as politicians.
- However, a functioning democracy is based on an informed and active citizenship that relies on public information, equally available to all citizens, to make decisions. The main sources of public information are the legacy media and news journalism.
- If and when people’s trust in the legacy media declines – that is, when the media’s reliability and impartiality come into question – people will look to social media, in their many forms, for information. Even though people, in the main, do not trust these sources any more than they trust the legacy media, they accept them as being equally relevant (ETB, 2017).
- For a healthy democracy, the news media must enjoy public trust and should remain open to all. Moreover, the media must provide a voice to their constituencies; that is, people from all different social strata and groups. To achieve this, a radical change in the present media and communication policy based on the recognition of citizens’ information and communication rights is needed. For democratic participation, citizens need to have equal access to all relevant information and knowledge. Citizens should enjoy equal competence in using information and knowledge to meet their needs and obtain benefits. Citizens must also have the equal right to be heard and taken seriously, and their privacy must be protected equally. Social media do not serve these needs, as they do not provide for the required diversity and ubiquity of information.

In this chapter, we will use the Nordic countries as a case study to explore the relationship between inequality and the media in greater depth. The Nordic experience and the Nordic welfare state offer us a more general framework for analysing the recent developments in Europe and the US (Syvertsen et al., 2014). We will first offer some conceptual clarification and define the main terms used. After this, we will expand the picture that world political and economic leaders have painted about the potential social and political consequences of rising inequality and their view of the role of the media in these developments. Next, we will discuss the role that the media

have played in the construction of Northern European welfare societies. Based on these experiences, an elaboration of how the societal functions of the media have fundamentally transformed in the last few decades will follow. Lastly, we will discuss how the European Union's media and communications policy can be radicalized to promote democracy and equal social relations.

Conceptual clarification

To clarify the approach taken to the relationship between inequality and the media in this chapter, we distinguish between four ways of analysing this connection. The first concerns the equality of social relations between people working in the media: how well are the genders or different minority groups represented in the professions of journalists, producers and media executives, and are they treated on equal terms to other groups (equality in profession)? The second approach asks how different social groups and strata are represented in and through the media: Do less-wealthy and marginalized groups receive fair and equal representation in the media compared with those in powerful positions (equality in representation)? The third way is to analyse the differences between social groups in relation to media access as well as their competence in using information for personal and common benefit (information gap). Finally, the fourth approach is based on the assumed role of the media in bringing us a daily account of what is real and “normal”, including establishing the normality of inequality and social polarization. All these approaches should be applied when critically studying the relationship between inequality and the media. However, in this chapter, we will follow the fourth approach, asking how the media's role in the normalization of inequality is related to a recent contrary development – the growing popular distrust in the media.

Although the meaning of inequality might seem self-evident – it is the state of a lack of equality – there are a number of ways to define it in detail (Atkinson, 2015; Bourginon, 2015; Dorling, 2015; Holton, 2014; Novak, 2018; Stiglitz, 2012; Therborn, 2013). For the purpose of exploring the relationship between inequality and the media, it suffices to state that inequality refers to “differences in the circumstances, opportunities, life chances, and characteristics of populations or individuals” (Holton, 2014: 13) that are used to justify differences in the distribution of power. When speaking of inequality, we are usually engaged in an inherently normative discourse involving judgements about what is considered to be fair and just. In a democracy, equality is typically regarded as a cornerstone of what is considered to be fair and just, and policies are most often justified by their contribution to increasing equality and eradicating inequality (Christiano, 2002; Held, 2006; Keane, 2010).

It should be noted that our approach to inequality transcends concerns regarding differences in material relations, like wealth or income, alone. Following Holton (2014) and Therborn (2013), other forms of asymmetric relations in terms of gender, culture,

ethnic origins, sexual orientation, education, family background and religious or other convictions, among others, are sources of inequality that are as relevant. In practical terms, even in conditions of relatively low levels of material inequality, as in the Nordic countries, inequalities exist in relation to gender, ethnic origin, education, health and other areas of life. It is also worth emphasizing that ongoing processes of digitalization, encompassing all areas of society, are generating new forms and modalities of inequality that are often still overlooked (Robinson et al., 2015).

There is much academic debate on the relationship between inequality and social trust. The question is whether we can establish causality between them. For example, would policies aimed at increasing equality simultaneously bring about a higher level of social trust or vice versa? With higher social trust in society, are social relations more equal? There are different opinions about the answer and differing results from research (Barone & Mocetti, 2016; Bergh & Bjørnskov, 2011, 2013; Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2012; Elgar, 2010; Gärtner & Prado, 2016; Jordahl, 2007; Nannestad, 2008). Most researchers seem to agree that societies with a high level of social trust have succeeded in designing policies to reduce inequality better than societies with a lower level of trust. However, this has not been followed by a parallel increase in social trust. This would mean that even successful social welfare policies do not automatically increase social trust among those benefitting from the policies (Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2012; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005).

Nordic countries are traditionally countries with a high level of social trust as well as examples of well-functioning public welfare services. They are also countries with media systems that historically have strong roots in civil society and associational life and close relations to the political system, for example in the form of public subsidies and public service broadcasting (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Syvertsen et al., 2014). In our analysis, the media in these countries are inseparable parts of the mechanism producing a high level of social trust within the welfare state system. In this respect, we can say that the media are a central part of the building of the Nordic welfare model.

From this viewpoint, the question concerns what role the media have today, when – along with most European countries – the Nordic countries are experiencing increasing social inequality (Kvist et al., 2012; Nordic Economic Policy Review (NEPR), 2018). If the Nordic media system historically has been part of high trust relations aimed at sustaining consensual welfarist policies, what are its aims and functions today?

It is quite problematic to define what the media are today, because what we call “media” now once held a very different meaning. Media can be defined from different perspectives: as a technology, as a cultural institution or as an everyday practice of ordinary people. From the viewpoint of *technology*, contemporary media consist of all the traditional means of communication, including their different communicative modes – newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film, music records and so on. What is new is that, while all these “old” forms and technologies still exist, they now possess a second existence in digital form. They can be accessed through the internet,

although accessibility may be conditioned differently in the online world, for example through paywalls or subscription charges.

Additionally, the internet and digitalization have brought about a new form of mediated communication that is often called, somewhat misleadingly, “social media”, which constitute a collision between technical infrastructures and their social and cultural applications. One of the main differences here is that, while the services and content of the “old” media were always, by necessity, edited and curated at least to some degree – that is, the content was selected and “quality controlled” – social media are, assumedly and manifestly, non-edited and free of curation. This means that as *cultural institutions*, “old” and “new” media function on entirely different bases. Whereas the “old” media could present themselves as promoting some normative collective values – objectivity, pluralism, social responsibility and tolerance – social media, as a cultural institution, present themselves as being free from these normative allegiances.

From the user’s viewpoint, as *everyday practices*, what the media – in whatever technological form – have and continue to offer is rather practical. Clearly, people used media (newspapers, radio and television) in the 1950s and 1960s quite differently and for different purposes from today. For most European families, television became a living room fixture during the 1960s, but it only had one or two channels. For most, the print media and radio were the main sources of daily news and entertainment. The media structured people’s everyday lives in ways that are completely different from today, which is characterized by the media’s omnipresence.

It is also important to note that we speak of the media in very different contexts today. While the media – or the mass media, as they were once called – were at one time understood to be promoters of social integration, they are today divided into several branches with differing commitments. One branch – especially the news media (such as quality newspapers and the BBC) – still value their social responsibility role and the principles and practices of liberal democracy. Another segment mostly follows the market and the entertainment of its audiences. The third group capitalizes on the policies of anti-elitism and populism and subscribes to right-wing as well as to left-wing politics. Finally, there are social media, which not only include the three previous groups but, more importantly, give voice and access – presumedly, at least – to everybody.

Concerns of the elites

To explore further the concern of global elites regarding the media, it would be helpful to review some recent facts. First, right-wing parties have increased in popularity and continue to challenge the traditional power of the “old” parties in the majority of European countries (for an overview, see New York Times (NYT), 2016). Furthermore, a recent survey of 28 countries found that more than 75 per cent of respondents agreed that “the system is biased against regular people and favours the rich and

powerful” (ETB, 2017: 2). According to the survey, the media “[are] distrusted in more than 80 per cent of the countries [...] to a level near government” (ETB, 2017: 3). The “old” media are continuing their downward spiral: in Britain, the circulation of daily newspapers fell from 10.5 million to 6 million copies between 2000 and 2015 (Wikipedia, 2017), and the development has been similar in other countries (for the Nordic developments, see Harrie, 2018). Simultaneously, social media have increased in importance: in the United States, the use of online social networking among adults rose from 7 to 64 per cent between 2005 and 2015 (Perrin, 2015). In 2016, 68 per cent of all Americans used Facebook (Greenwood et al., 2016), while the figure was over 75 per cent in the Nordic countries (AudienceProject, 2016). At the same time, inequality has continued to increase in all the developed countries, especially in the United States and Britain but also in all of the European Union (Cribb et al., 2017; Income Inequality, 2018; OECD, 2017; Social Europe, 2017; Stone et al., 2018), including the Nordic welfare states (Kvist et al., 2012; NEPR, 2018).

It is no wonder that, as stated in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the recognition of inequality and social and political polarization as major threats to liberal democracies has become part of the contemporary political mainstream. Such threats were among those identified by world economic and political leaders in their yearly Davos meeting in January 2017:

The combination of economic inequality and political polarisation tends to amplify global risks, fraying the social solidarity on which the legitimacy of our economic and political systems rests. New economic systems and policy paradigms are urgently needed to address the sources of popular disenchantment. (WEF, 2017: 13)

In many projections, these fears are combined with the emerging threat of “post-truth political debate” or profound changes in the way in which news and information are produced, distributed and shared (WEF, 2017: 24), referring to the debate over “fake news” and disinformation:

The main threat is that citizens’ trust in media and politicians might further erode, creating a vicious cycle that threatens liberal democracy. States must better protect their hardware; but cyber defence will not be enough. Democratic institutions can also support media literacy, strengthen their communication efforts, and educate their citizens. [...] Preventing a “post-truth” world, in which “nothing is true and everything is possible”, is a task for society as a whole. (Munich Security Report, 2017: 42)

While the interconnections between inequality and the media were not the main focus in either Davos or Munich, both reports recognized their historical contexts as being defined by developments in Britain, the United States and other developed countries – including the Nordic ones. The logic is rather simple and straightforward: increasing economic inequality and social polarization bring about resentment and distrust towards elites. The resulting disenchantment among not only lower-income and less-educated groups but also educated middle classes is politically exploited by

populists at both the right and the left end of the political spectrum; part of the media is harnessed by populist anti-elitist propaganda that spreads disinformation and “fake news,” and the subsequent political and social confusion is then exploited by anti-Western forces, such as Russia, China and terrorist groups, to undermine Western democracies and pursue their own purposes.

For the elites, the problem with the media is that they have not assisted in containing the tide of anti-elitism. For a large part of the European and US populations, the legacy media are identified with social and political elites, seen as presenting and promoting their particular interests. In many countries, we have witnessed a constant decline in trust in traditional news media, accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the use of more horizontal sources of information – the internet and peer groups, for instance. However, it is noteworthy that, although the use of social media has escalated, they are not highly trusted. In contrast, the trust in social media has decreased (EBU, 2018; Mitchell & Barthel, 2017; Swift, 2016). In other words, people are constantly searching for information and advice from sources other than the legacy media. As a parallel development, from the viewpoint of elites, people are disinformed and, as a consequence, behave irrationally and against their own interests (see Ashworth-Hayes & Schickes, 2016; Chakraborty, 2016; Parkinson, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2015).

Although the World Economic Forum’s analysis of the sources of discontent is based on serious academic research and factual evidence, its proposals for correcting the situation are less convincing. Instead of recognizing the main cause of the problem, which relates directly to structural, social and economic inequality, it places the responsibility on political, economic and social actors who have not carried out what is required:

It is critical that policy-makers and other stakeholders – across government, civil society, academia and the media – collaborate to create more agile and adaptive forms of local, national and global governance and risk management. (WEF, 2017: 15)

To make a critical interpretation of the two reports, the media are expected, together with politicians, to perform better in terms of persuading people to accept the status quo and with it to agree with increased inequality and social polarization. From this viewpoint, the right and left radical forces have captured the social media and used them for anti-democratic purposes by spreading “fake news” and “alternative truths”, and the legacy or traditional media have more or less betrayed the trust invested in them, failing to prevent this from happening (Blake, 2017; Swaine, 2017). This has created an opportunity for populist movements that utilize popular distrust of the elites to their advantage.

According to this analysis, the solution offered by the elites to solve the crisis of trust, echoed by the legacy media, is not to provide new measures that would radically tackle the real sources of inequality (Arrese & Vara, 2015). What they suggest are more or less already existing means and instruments; this time, however, they are intended to appear more convincing and capable. The key words pointing to policy

reforms, in both the market and the public institutions, include “responsible leadership”, “social inclusion”, “better governance” and “media literacy”, and addressing the global risks effectively requires “(...) responsive and responsible leadership with a deeper commitment to inclusive development and equitable growth, both nationally and globally” (WEF, 2017: 4). In sum, the cure offered is to appeal to the elites’ moral and ethical obligations instead of proposing the necessary reforms to the power-related structures that actively produce inequality and polarization.

Media and the production of inequality: The loss of trust in ”old” media

It must be emphasized that one important dimension in the transformation from the “old” mass media to the “new” digital social media is the change in the media’s social and cultural function. What we today call *the media* have never been the only mediating institution – or institutionalized practice – connecting us to external reality. The media are one social and cultural institution among others that provide us with essential information and social competencies. The educational, religious, cultural and public institutions that together form our epistemic order and help us to understand better the world and our roles in it are perhaps even more important than the media to our cognitive and emotional connection to the world. The role of the media is merely to update and tune us cognitively and emotionally to various aspects of the world (Nieminen, 2014).

It seems clear that, at some stage in the 1980s and 1990s, a fundamental shift took place in the public life of Western democracies, changing the way in which a fair and just society was understood and defined. From the Second World War until then, a prevailing assumption was that the central goal of the reconstruction of Western societies was to provide a more equal society and to eradicate poverty. Major social reforms – a pension system, social welfare, health care and education – were tabled in all Western societies and aimed to diminish the gap between those with fewer resources and those with more (Crouch, 1999; Gamble, 2016; Streeck, 2014; Therborn, 2013).

The media were part of this process. Practically all major media outlets in Europe adopted allegiance to the ethical principle of social responsibility, which formed a normative basis for translating the traditional journalistic principles of objectivity, pluralism and truthfulness into the processes of daily journalistic practice. This is best illustrated by the ethical codes guiding journalists, which have been approved by journalist unions in different countries (Christians et al., 2009: 64-87). This ethical orientation permeated every function of the different forms of media.

A parallel development, taking place to some degree in many other countries in Western Europe but especially in Northern European countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland), was the process of social and political pacification and the softening of class conflict in the 1950s and 1960s. This was facilitated by material

rewards resulting from the reconstruction period after the Second World War: general life conditions improved, the standard of living increased and material affluence was more evenly spread among the population. The state took increasing responsibility over matters that were previously the responsibility of individual citizens and civil society actors, such as social security and health care (Barker & Lavalette, 2015).

As the role of the state grew in all sectors of society, the basic social and political dynamics changed fundamentally. From the 1950s to the 1970s, civil society actors – trade unions, voluntary associations, civic organizations and civic movements – were active in representing the needs and interests of their members and followers. The media of that time – newspapers, magazines, journals and leaflets – acted as a mediating channel, bringing the voices from below into the public domain to be negotiated between different interests. Although this might be characterized as a common Western European experience, it is clear that it has taken place in different forms and to different degrees in different parts of Europe, as analysed, for example, in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) seminal contribution from the early 2000s: *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*.

Especially in the Nordic countries, it can be seen that the progressive development of the social welfare state eventually captured the initiative from civil society and incorporated many social movements into its administrative and disciplinary logic. During the 1980s and 1990s, the historical conditions for social and political mobilization had already changed. Several central civil society organizations were either merged with the state apparatus (in the form of committees, councils or advisory groups or as active civil society advocates were recruited as politicians or appointed as experts) or declined in significance. As a result of decreasing social and political conflict, political parties began drifting towards the centre (Barker & Lavalette, 2015; Crouch, 2013; Mair, 2013; Tourain, 2014).

This development was also reflected in the realm of the media. The political press remained prominent and prolific until the late 1960s and early 1970s, catering to rich *external pluralism* in the social and political public spheres. All the main political and ideological voices had a platform of their own – so long as there was somebody to read or listen. However, as the process of social and political pacification progressed, ideological and political newspapers began to lose their readership and with this their financial basis. One by one, they closed down. The field was now left open to commercial newspapers, which, to gather as large a readership as possible, had to navigate politically and socially to the mainstream, seeking to placate the majority – that is, combining some of the left with some of the right (Curran & Seaton, 2010; Gustafsson & Rydén, 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Nerone, 2015).

In the Nordic countries, this resulted in a form of *internal pluralism*: the main newspapers sought to cater simultaneously to all the different interests of their main audiences. This resulted in the loss of external pluralism and the exclusion of the voices of minorities and those marginalized from the public sphere: groups that did not see themselves as being represented in the legacy media (Barnhurst & Nerone,

2001). This experience of being excluded and marginalized was further echoed in the wake of the economic downturn in the early 1990s and especially in the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008 (Judis, 2016; Touraine, 2014).

Together with the changes in the media field in the late 1970s and 1980s, the political climate in Western countries was in flux. This was personified by two influential political leaders, Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States, both of whom drew their inspiration from the neoclassical economics of the Chicago school and its representatives, the most famous of whom were Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek (Margaret Thatcher Foundation (MTF), 2017). Their – and the political and economic forces that they represented – message was that the time of the social contract of the reconstruction period was finally over and that social and economic pacification in the form of the social welfare state was outdated. Instead of a universal right to social welfare for all members of society, justification for public policies was now established in the name of economic efficiency and competitiveness. This new neoliberal orthodoxy, derived from Hayek and Friedman, was based on the normative assumption of the primacy of the economy over social welfare. Public interest, previously defined in terms of democracy and universal rights, was reinterpreted and redefined in terms of economic efficiency and competitiveness (Crouch, 2004; Harvey, 2007; McChesney, 2014).

As this new orthodoxy eventually permeated all levels of policy making, it also started to be reflected in the media. Instead of speaking on behalf of the whole society and welfare for all, the legacy media adopted the rules of the “new normal” (Osberg, 2014), presenting the condition of increasing inequality and social polarization as a reality with no alternative (Coleman & Ross, 2010; Prior, 2007).

The transformation of the media: Functions redefined

To explain the profound distrust of a growing part of society towards the legacy media, we must consider three parallel developments of the last two decades. The first one concerns the major changes in the social structures of societies. Due to transformations in all areas of social activity – production, education, demography, housing and so on – citizens’ need for information and communication has been profoundly altered, resulting in major changes in the role of the media in people’s everyday lives. There is less need for the mainstream “same-size-fits-all” types of services but an increased sense of urgency to address the specific needs of the new social strata – educated and faced with an entirely new work–life environment. This process of social and cultural differentiation is constant and places substantial demands on societal sub-systems, including education, sciences, public services, information and communication, and others (Juteau, 2003).

At the same time, in the sphere of production, incessant processes of automation and globalization are leading to the disappearance of an increasing number of tradi-

tional trades and professions, destroying not only traditional industrial communities but entire branches of industries (see Griswold, 2013; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2016). Several post-Second World War generations have grown up trusting the competence of the social welfare state to address their concerns and needs, yet now – especially after the financial and economic crisis of 2008-2009 – they face increasing future risks, including unemployment and a weaker safety net. For them, the legacy media represent the elites who have betrayed them (Calhoun, 2016; ETB, 2017).

Second, in a parallel development, digital technology has transformed the concept of the media into something previously unimaginable. Instead of the old distinction between one-way transmission and two-way communication – connected to the era of print media, radio broadcasting and telephony – the internet, with its applications, now fosters multidirectional communication. Instead of the time and space restrictions of the “old” media, the internet offers services “anywhere, anytime”, both online and offline, and, instead of the separation between print, electronic and recorded media created by the “old” technology, the internet brings all of them together (Castells, 2009; Kellerman, 2014).

This also means that, instead of the separate industries of the print media, broadcasting and telephony, we currently have one media/communication industry, defined in terms of digital technology. Whereas previously we had the problem of oligopolization within separate industrial branches, and later cross-ownership between print and electronic media, today we have the problem of the global oligopolization of the media/communication industry, exemplified by Google, Facebook and Microsoft. All these companies, by and large, are difficult or nearly impossible to regulate with the means available to national as well as international authorities (Berners-Lee, 2018; DeNardis, 2012; Drezner, 2004; Freedman, 2012; Tusikov, 2017).

The third factor, closely linked with the previous one, concerns the major transformation in the economics of the media. Advertising, traditionally the main funding source for the commercial media, has navigated with increasing speed from the sites of the legacy media (based mostly on local and national markets) to social media platforms (functioning on global markets), benefitting the global companies mentioned above. For most of the legacy media operators, the consequences have been dramatic: they have been obliged either to find new business models and sources of income or to close down their operations (Barthel, 2018; Picard, 2016; Trappel et al., 2015). The challenge has been especially difficult to the media in small countries, where the growing outflow of advertising money has meant fewer opportunities to fund the new investments and innovations that are urgently needed to operate in the new environment (see Picard et al., 2015). For example, in three Nordic countries, Norway, Denmark and Sweden, newspapers’ share of the total advertising revenue was ca. 50 per cent in 2005; by 2016, it had dropped to 20 per cent. In that period, several daily newspapers were forced to close down (Harrie, 2018). In Finland, the advertising revenue of daily newspapers dropped from 620 million euros in 2007 to 302 euros in 2017 (Ekman & Weckström, 2016; TNS-Gallup, 2018).

Taking these developments together, it is no wonder that the legacy media suffer from weakening authority. In trying to cater to all audiences, their ability to speak and give a voice to the ever more differentiated public has waned. As we pointed out earlier in this chapter, it is clear that people's ways of and purposes for using the media have changed fundamentally in the past 50 years. However, although many studies have described these changes, there has been little agreement among researchers about what these changes mean: for some, the digital revolution means more participation and more creativity (Jenkins, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2018); for others, digitalization means greater concentration of power and increasing surveillance (Fuchs, 2017; McChesney, 2013).

One of the central claims in this chapter is that a major shift has occurred in the functions that the media serve in people's everyday lives. There is ample literature on how the functions of the media should be defined (for a review published in the 1980s, see McQuail, 1987; for one published in the 2000s, see McQuail, 2010). One classical approach proposed classification into five functions or "needs" that the media serve: cognitive needs, affective needs, integrative needs, social needs and needs related to escape or tension release (Blumler, 1979; Bracken & Lombard, 2001; Katz et al., 1973; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983; Ruggiero, 2000). Here, we slightly modify the classification by Katz and colleagues and propose that the media accommodate the following functions: information (re: cognitive needs), orientation (integrative needs), recreation (escape and tension release), social connection (social needs) and self-expression (affective needs) (Nieminen, 2016; Nieminen & Aslama Horowitz, 2016). All these media functions (or, from the users' viewpoint, modalities of use), once served exclusively by "old" or traditional media, are now, from the viewpoint of users, equally offered by social media – and most are more easily available without the constraints of time and space.

1. *Information* refers to the practical everyday knowledge that we need to step outside and complete our daily chores. The informative function of the traditional media relates to the delivery of fact-based material, including news, weather, calendrical events and classified advertisements. Such material is today increasingly aggregated by and available on "free" internet platforms, challenging the traditional economy of the legacy media. The legacy media's answer to this is to concentrate more on quality content, such as investigative and advocacy journalism. However, user statistics have shown that this material is consumed mostly by a relatively restricted, well-educated elite audience and fails to reach mass audiences (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). This "information gap" has fed much public debate over "fake news" and "alternative truths", which has unfortunately led to even further polarization in the public sphere.

From the viewpoint of democracy, the informative function of the media is crucial. The core of the concept of democratically defined public interest is based on the choices and decisions made by citizens who are equally provided

with the best information and knowledge available. To improve the media's function in providing relevant information, the solution cannot be left to market forces. Such practices and processes need to be consolidated to serve citizens' information and communication needs on an equal basis. A good example of these practices and processes is the institution of public service broadcasting (today, public service media).

2. *Orientation* refers to the guidance that we follow to make our value judgements: Whom should I vote for in the next municipal elections? What should I think about Brexit or Trump? Is nuclear energy good for the environment? With the desire to make themselves more interesting and relevant to mass audiences, legacy media outlets are increasingly applying an opinionated and argumentative style, often presented by celebrity columnists and branded journalists (see Holton & Molyneux, 2017; Hoyt, 2008). This has not, however, lessened the widespread distrust, as this type of reorientation is not felt to reflect properly people's experience of diminishing social security and uncertain future expectations.

From the viewpoint of offering citizens multiple, even contradictory, choices to form their own opinions freely, media pluralism is essential. To prevent a monopoly of opinions, citizens must have equal access to a plurality of information and knowledge sources. There are several ways to promote media plurality: the restriction of ownership concentration, operational licences and concessions, and critical media education and literacy. The danger is that, without a coherent public policy and democratic regulation, pluralism will easily lose out to commercial logic.

3. *Social connection* refers to media offerings that enhance the user's membership of a community; it pertains to social belonging and the need for an identity as a member of the wider society. Major changes have occurred in the ability of the media to offer social connectivity. During the period of the party press (until the 1960s), the "old" media (newspapers) offered basically class-based social connection and community-based experiences for different audience groups. With the emergence of the modern commercial press and the advance of television, this social connection was based, in principle, on the creation of the feeling of shared experiences among anonymous members of the (national) audience. Now, the internet and its applications (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Whatsapp) offer the potential for close social connectivity among, for example, the members of the app-based community.

There is a fear that the users of social media platforms are creating closed communities or "bubbles", separated from other similar communities and unable to communicate between and across these communities. This allegedly leads to the "echo chamber" effect, which reinforces the personal beliefs of the members and excludes alternative views (Garrett, 2009; see Flaxman et al., 2016). It seems that, to fight these developments, we need public initiatives aimed at

creating positive connections between the “bubbles” and at offering platforms for common action and shared collective experiences. By endorsing different forms of community and local media for collaboration and co-creation, public service media companies and other cultural and educational institutions can act – if properly resourced and governed – as facilitators for such initiatives.

4. *Recreation* refers to content consumed during free time and for educational activities. This includes issues relating to entertainment, culture, arts, sports and so on. In the areas of entertainment and education, the convergence of the legacy media with the internet is perhaps less conflictual. Audiences diverge significantly in terms of their needs, but different platforms and technologies – even when engaged in fierce competition – complement each other (e.g. BBC, Sky, Netflix and HBO). The main difference here concerns the media’s financial model: in the period of the European (semi-)monopoly of “free” public service broadcasting, there were only modest conflicts of interest within the European television industry – at least compared with today’s situation (Harrison & Woods, 2007; Papathanassopoulos & Negrine, 2011). Today, the recreational functions of commercial audio-visual media have expanded to all electronic platforms, and the function of the public service media has been relegated to a more or less complementary role for the commercial media industry.

Again – based on the experiences of the last two decades – when left exclusively to the commercial media market, the recreational function of the media will focus on products of mass entertainment: box office movies, game shows, drama and reality TV shows. Quality content, including educational and other challenging offerings, would be limited to consumption by an educated minority. The role of public service media is again crucial here, as are other potential forms of public subsidies for the production and dissemination of quality cultural and educational content.

5. *Self-expression* refers to the need to have one’s voice heard and face known, be it in the “letters to the editor”, in phone-ins or on the radio. This is the area in which digitalization has promoted the most effective change. Compared with the edited and curated “freedom of speech and expression” offered by the legacy/traditional media, the internet offers historically unparalleled freedom of individual expression. Anyone can now publicly present him- or herself and express his or her own views of the world without prior (obvious) editorial or curated intervention (although algorithms are today performing curation). This is facilitated by platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and Twitter, to name a few. This development has opened pathways for enhancing democracy and a diversity of voices but also – as we well know – for pursuing purposes that are antagonistic to democracy (Berners-Lee, 2018).

The worsening problem concerns the downsides of free speech on the internet: hate speech, “alternative truths”, “fake news”, trolls, identity theft and so on.

As internet governance is based on voluntary regulation in some capacity by all the main stakeholders, it is difficult to create any consistent control system or even a common understanding of the purposes for regulating and controlling freedom of expression on the internet. The only solution would require negotiations within the framework of international organizations (the United Nations, UNESCO, Internet Corporation Assigned Names and Numbers, the EU, The International Telecommunication Union, etc.) aimed at establishing an effective global regulatory framework – the urgency of which has finally been recognized by the European Commission (European Commission, 2018).

Policy implications:

A radical democratic media policy reform is needed

In light of the evidence offered above, it seems evident that the media has the potential to act as part of the unequal structures of our societies. At the same time, however, the media play a potentially elemental role in creating and disseminating critical information and knowledge to unpack those unequal societal relations.

The question posed to critical media scholars and media policy makers is the following: How much impact can media policy and media regulation have in undoing, or at least decreasing, inequality and the structures supporting it? One task that media policy and regulation can perform is to strengthen people's knowledge and understanding of both the present state and conditions of inequality and the ways in which to fight them. This is also a precondition for increasing trust in media and media-related information, which in turn is a prerequisite for the strengthening of democracy.

From this perspective, we bring citizens' communication and information rights to this discussion. The logic is simple. Democracy needs citizens who are equally informed; thus, they must be guaranteed equal access to all relevant information. This makes the case for citizens' communication and information rights. The basic elements of these can be derived from, among others, international treaties and conventions, such as the UN Declarations of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Nieminen & Aslama Horowitz, 2016). For a further look, we propose five areas of communication and information rights: rights to access and availability, the right to critical competence, the right to dialogue and the right to privacy. On their basis, we ask how the European Union has performed in their implementation.

Over the years, the European Union has adopted a number of policies related to European citizens' information and communication rights. However, they have not created any coherent entity but are dispersed among the regulation of different sectors of the media industry as well between the EU bodies – the Commission and its Directorates, the European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights. For this reason, they have different forms and differing statuses: some are EU direc-

tives, some are EC regulations, some are EC communications and some are just the European Parliament's reports and ECHR rulings. To give examples in relation to the five areas of rights detailed above, the EU's policies can be illuminated through the following documents:

- *Right to access*: This includes ensuring that all citizens are guaranteed equal access to the media, following the model of universal service obligation applied to telephony, now extended to all media, including the internet. The main EU policy document is the Commission's *Communication on a digital single market strategy for Europe, from 2015* (COM (2015) 192 final), which was followed by, among other policy aims, a proposal for a directive establishing the European electronic communications code (recast) (COM (2016) 590).
- *Right to availability*: This requires that all citizens should be guaranteed equal availability of the best information and knowledge obtainable; that is, the cost to attain correct and relevant information and knowledge should be as low as possible and treat people equally. This is partly served by the EU's policy on public service broadcasting, which is still based on the EU's Protocol to the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 (Official Journal C 340, 1997, November 10: 0109), partly on the EC's actions on media pluralism, among them establishing the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) in 2011, and partly on the EC's recent efforts to deal with the questions of disinformation and fake news, as documented in the *Communication on tackling online disinformation: A European approach* (COM (2018) 236).
- *Right to competence*: This means that all citizens should have equal opportunities to gain the critical skills and education needed to use the media according to their best interests and needs and concerns education and training at all levels. The EU's most recent policy document in this area is the EC's *Communication on the digital education action plan* (COM (2018) 22).
- *Right to dialogue*: This includes the requirement that all citizens should have their voices equally heard and taken seriously; this means that freedom of speech and expression for some is not enough: it must apply equally to all. This is clearly an underdeveloped policy area and, judging by the EC's policy documents, one that seems to concern mostly the EU's relations with non-EU countries. References to dialogue lead to the Commission's "Europe for Citizens" programme, and references to freedom of expression lead to the pages of the Directorate International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO).
- *Right to privacy*: This requires that all citizens should have equal rights to control their own personal lives and individual information; private information should not be made public without the consent of the individual in question. This has been a clear emphasis area in the last couple of years, especially with the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018.

How well do these EU policy areas, serving differing motives and being equipped with uneven competences, realistically serve European citizens' rights to information and communications? A proper answer would require a thorough analysis of all the documents and related material. For the purposes of this chapter, we have to settle for a general conclusion, which briefly reads as follows. In the conditions of today's media and communication environment, the EU's policies – both planned and implemented – are feeble and contradictory. As the recent developments in the Nordic countries teach us, we need stronger and more effective European policies if we want to protect democracy and aim to improve equality. What is urgently needed is a comprehensive and radical reform of the European Union's media and communication policy that guarantees communication and information rights to all European citizens.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that we have entered times when increasing inequality feeds growing distrust in social and political institutions. Together, these two tendencies – diminishing equality and lack of trust – create a challenge to European democracy. The media have a pivotal role in these developments. On the one hand, they are central to democracy; on the other, they are part of the process of normalizing inequality. In the media, the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots is the “new normal”.

We applied the Nordic welfare model as our normative point of departure. In this tradition, the media were, and to a great degree still are, seen as part of the integrative process of building the social welfare state, and the media follow the ethics of social responsibility. These principles formed the legal background to the whole media system, guaranteeing citizens' democratic rights to information and communications. We argued that today, even in the Nordic countries, the basic functions of the media have been fundamentally altered. This is mostly because of the alterations in the role and competence of the nation states in producing the kind of welfare and security that was still possible in the 1990s. Economic globalization and European integration have changed the basic conditions and reduced the sovereignty of small states in Europe. The ability of the media to construct “imagined communities”, based on trust in the competence of nation states to provide public goods, has given way to different kinds of media-related communities. A number of them challenge, both from the right and from the left, the present political and economic rule, bringing about inequality and social and cultural divisions.

Based on the documents from the World Economic Forum and the Munich Security Conference, the global elites appear to blame the media for their failure to bring about social and political stability while acknowledging the negative impact of inequality on social cohesion. In their analysis, the media have not performed well enough in

accommodating the public opinion to adapt to the conditions of the “new normal”: the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Our conclusion is that the national legal and regulatory instruments are no longer valid to guarantee citizens’ democratic rights to information and communications. As this is not within the interests of the media market players, we have to turn to more competent political actors, such as the European Union. Although only a regional power, the EU represents a major media and communication market globally and could have a significant influence on global politics in this role if it so willed.

As the EU has, at least potentially, control over the market forces, we propose a radical democratic reform of the EU’s media and communication policy that would take citizens’ democratic rights to information and communications as the starting point. We propose five policy areas that are pertinent to democratic communication rights: access to information, the availability of information, media competence, dialogue and privacy. A quick overview of the EU’s policies in these areas demonstrates that they are disparate, incoherent and sometimes incompatible. What is needed is a policy approach that addresses citizens’ rights to information and communications holistically and on a clear democratic–normative basis. Although we have learned that more equality does not automatically translate into more social trust, the recent years in Europe and in the US have proved that the opposite can be true – increasing inequality leads to increasing social distrust and growth of political extremism.

The new European regulatory framework based on citizens’ information and communication rights aims to create room for a critical European public sphere that could offer fresh platforms for transnational dialogue on common issues, bringing about shared experiences between Europeans from different parts of the continent (For abundant research literature on the European public sphere, see e.g. Benson, 2009; Bozzini & Bee, 2010; Fossum & Schlesinger, 2007; Fraser & Nash, 2014; Koopmans & Statham, 2010; Risse, 2015; Salovaara-Moring, 2009; Triandafyllidou et al., 2009). A new regulatory regime aimed both at increasing the openness of information and at giving voice to the now excluded minority interests and opinions could act as one step towards the much-needed democratization of European politics.

We believe that, where there is more open public debate and dialogue, there are possibilities for creating trust relations and consequently less room for antagonism and polarization. To use Chantal Mouffe’s (1999, 2018) terms, agonistic relations are always preferable to antagonism, as they reserve room for dialogue and compromises instead of antagonistic monologue and the quest for hegemony. It should be emphasized, however, that we do not expect the return of social trust in its “old” systemic form within the framework of nation states. What is needed is a new form of social trust on a higher transnational level. The new European regulatory framework for media and communications could offer one step towards this aim.

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Chapter 4

Scale economies and international communications inequality, 1820-2020

Jeremy Tunstall

Each new communications era across the last 200 years has introduced new economies of scale and fresh inequalities. The biggest single inequality has been that, at least since 1870, the United States and its people have been ahead of the rest of the world. Since around 1920 Hollywood has led world entertainment. Since 1980 Hollywood has been merging with Silicon Valley tech and with computing and telephony. The United States has been uniquely successful in attracting finance from banks and from Washington, and in combining continental with local and intimate communications.

Across 200 years, the communications industries have exhibited extreme economies of scale alongside extremes of social inequality. Within these 200 years there have been three major phases.

During 1820 to 1920, there were huge increases in communications scale and in scale economies. Until the introduction of steam printing around 1820, the newspaper was a hand-made product. In the next hundred years, some leading newspapers went from daily sales of perhaps one thousand to daily sales of over one million. Audience (or readership) inequalities were extreme. Across Europe (but not the USA) newspapers initially suffered penal taxation and elite people read an expensive elite daily paper while most Europeans in the 1830s and 1840s were still illiterate and reading nothing. Between 1850 and 1900, literacy rates in Euro-America hugely expanded, but still in 1900 most working-class people had no media contact. Meanwhile, across Asia and Africa, the few elite port city newspapers had very small sales.

We can now see the years 1920 to 1980 as the classic era of the “mass media”. During these years, the printed press and silent movies were joined by talkie movies, radio and TV. Hollywood was found guilty of cartel behaviour and production companies were forbidden to own theatre chains. Various forms of American semi-cartels were, however, allowed to continue. Three radio-and-TV networks (NBC, CBS and later ABC) prevailed. A few American newspaper chains each owned newspapers across a number of big key cities. Europe developed a somewhat different pattern of scale economies, which included “public service” radio and TV monopolies.

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During this 1920-80 classic “mass media” period, the Hollywood movie business achieved extended scale economies by first selling its movies into theatres around the world and then offering multiple showings of the same movies to TV channels around the world (Elberse, 2013). These extreme scale economies went alongside some reduction in consumer inequalities. Across Euro-America much, or most, media output was aimed at the mid-market, both national and regional. But in some other respects – such as the Hollywood and European star systems – inequality may have increased (Tunstall, 1977).

The years 1980-2020 saw the rapid emergence of the internet, online, smartphones and the Silicon Valley companies. Audience numbers would now routinely be hundreds of millions, or a billion, people. An elite of multi-millionaires and some dollar multi-billionaires emerged. Meanwhile, a billion or two of the world’s people have become seriously more communications disadvantaged compared with their fellow citizens.

These post-1980 scale economies incorporated several new features. The rocket-like speed of company growth saw separate new domestic garage start-ups quickly advance to reaching hundreds of millions of people in America and around the world. These new Silicon Valley success stories typically involved a huge (or monopoly) share of one narrow market, such as Google in search. This led to the big successful company seeking to broaden its base by acquiring smaller companies in its own and other markets. Google (under the new umbrella name of Alphabet) soon owned another 200 companies.

Scale economies were further stretched by the effective merger of Silicon Valley (San Francisco) with Hollywood (Los Angeles) – involving Hollywood movies and Hollywood TV with, for example, Netflix’s offer of new premium drama and entertainment series. Netflix’s success soon attracted “streaming” competition from Apple, Amazon and others.

These fresh scale economies emerged alongside increased intra-industry inequalities. This new mix of Pacific coast communications capitalism developed its own small group of candidates for the title the World’s Richest Person. These new billionaires had initially tended to present themselves as geeky students in T-shirts, but most were in fact graduates of MIT, Harvard or other Ivy League universities. While still in their twenties, they attained big start-up loans from Wall Street and other banks (Rogers & Larsen, 1984). Below the dominant owner level, an elite group of CEOs and managers earned annual salaries in the tens of dollar millions. These companies tended to have smallish “professional” staffs, paid high salaries – such as ten times the national US average. But these new companies also employed largish numbers of lowly paid, low skilled, and often casual, employees. Many of these lowly paid people were employed in China or in cheap locations across Europe.

The star performer or celebrity of print, movies or radio/TV was a traditional category within the communications industry division of labour. Since 1980, the new communications landscape features many new styles of star and celebrity. Stars can now commune with thousands or millions of followers on a daily basis, offering

a big advance on the fan magazines and print advertising of traditional Hollywood. Today's celebrities can also turn themselves into a commercial product or service for sale to their followers.

Since 2010, a number of economists and others have pointed to increased levels of inequality in Euro-America and in the world (Atkinson, 2015; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2010; Stiglitz, 2012). Within the now huge communications sector, several strategic changes have had big implications for social inequality. Most communications depend upon advertising (for revenue and publicity) and/or on subscription. There has been a big switch of advertising revenue, away from newspapers and print. By 2018, about 40 per cent of world advertising spend went into online and social communications, while over 30 per cent still went into television. There had been a big drop in newspaper sales – and especially in the more mass-market newspapers.

Another obvious aspect of international communication inequality was the emergence of a small group of dominant American companies after 2010, the so-called FAANG group (comprising Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google). But by 2018, the key group was really much bigger and included Ali Baba, Amazon, Apple, AT&T, Time Warner, Baidu, CBS-Universal, Comcast, Disney, e-Bay, Facebook, Fox, Google and Netflix. The total leadership group by 2018 was at least 25 companies. Three of these were Chinese (Ali Baba, Baidu and Tencent). Nearly all of the other companies originated in San Francisco, Los Angeles or Seattle. This American dominance was, and still is, the biggest single inequality in world communications.

Euro-American communications inequality since 1870

In most areas of communications, Europe has been behind the United States since about 1870. European countries have had much smaller national populations than the US. Most European countries, for many of the last 150 years, have also been much less democratic and have had fewer market driven communications services.

The United States with its several governmental levels (federal, state, county, city) and its continental scale has been successful in developing communications industries which combine the macro (or US wide) level with the micro (small town, street, family) level. The recent communications revolution, exemplified by the smartphone computer-in-your-pocket, enables an individual to access national and international news and entertainment as well as talk with people in the small town, in the workplace or in the family.

Americans initially imported newspapers from London and Europe, but by 1870, the American newspaper industry had become the world's largest. In 1870, the US already published 5,871 newspaper and magazine titles – more than Britain, France, Prussia, Austria, Russia and Italy combined (Hudson, 1873). Most of the commercial, journalism, and technology advances of the British and French press around 1900 came from the United States. This included Hoe printing presses, Mergenthaler Li-

notype machines and the use of interviews, telephones and typewriters by journalists. Macro (continental) and micro (local) elements were combined within a number of American communications revolutions. From about 1870 and onwards very small local weekly newspapers could incorporate whole pages of Big City and national material from suppliers in Chicago and other large cities. By 1880, the Kellogg company was supplying pre-printed “boiler plate” pages to 800 papers, mostly across the mid-west states. News agencies, based in New York and Chicago, supplied fast daily news to the newspapers of the continent.

Both the telegraph and the telephone offered continental as well as local or family communication. Even the new movie theatres in 1900-14 offered live local entertainment and music alongside the Hollywood silent films. Both radio and television also developed many hundreds of very local stations alongside the NBC, CBS, and later ABC, networks.

When American cable-and-satellite boomed in the early 1980s, the industry was initially run by quite local companies. A common situation was a city in which perhaps four cable operators were each allocated one quarter of the city. This quite quickly changed into the traditional American pattern of a very few large companies (Tunstall, 1986).

The American communications industries have several other features to which Europe has given somewhat less attention. One of these is bank finance. The main source of communications industry finance has always been Wall Street but other banking centres – including Boston and San Francisco – have also played a part. One interesting California financier was Amadeo Peter Giannini, a San Jose-born banker who founded the Bank of Italy, which was later renamed the Bank of America. Among his many investments, Giannini acquired the original Hollywood major, United Artists.

Big Finance played a major role in the rapid growth of the Bell/AT&T semi-monopoly of the US telephone business. Aggressive growth meant that the United States had three times as many telephones as Germany per thousand population by 1930, and four times as many as Britain.

Wall Street played a very active role in the entire twentieth century history of Hollywood – including Hollywood silent and talkie movies, network radio, network television, music and cable television.

Alongside the banking system, the Federal government has assisted the Communications industries in a distinctively American and non-European way. The US Constitution, federal support for railroad construction – and subsequently the Department of Defense and the CIA – have all financially supported the American media (Stonor, 1999). The term “Soft Power” comes from a Harvard academic who also held a senior position in the Department of Defense (Nye, 2004). The Internet itself, of course, derives from the Department of Defense’s Arpanet project (Castells, 2001).

From the 1980s onwards, “Communications Deregulation” initially had an anti-trust flavour and was mainly focused on the giant Bell (AT&T) Telephone semi-monopoly. The Europeans largely failed to grasp what deregulation was all about, because Europe has a different tradition of public utilities, state owned telephony and

public broadcasting. Meanwhile, deregulation quickly moved on towards building a communication empire across the world in general and across Europe in particular. Few politicians, civil servants or journalists in France or Britain seemed to grasp the reality of America's deregulation offensive (Palmer & Tunstall, 1990). The Washington system of regulatory agencies (such as the FTC and FCC), as well as the sub-committees of the Senate and the House commerce committees, was indeed complex. This complexity has also increased, with new Washington military–security anxieties about both China and Russia.

Already in the 1980s, communications policy lobbying on Capitol Hill employed many hundreds of lobbyists. The number has more than doubled since then and American communications lobbying activity has spread to Brussels and to European and Asian national capitals.

Advertising finance is of great importance in American communications (alongside paid subscriptions). One of the biggest changes of recent years has been the migration of much advertising money from print and TV into Facebook, Google and other social media. Once again French, British and other European policymakers have been extremely slow in grasping the strategic significance of advertising in communications commerce and policy. This is despite the fact that Britain and France had two of the world's four largest advertising agencies in WPP and Publicis.

Satellite era: Euro-American inequalities

In retrospect, the years between 1975 and about 2005 can be seen as the satellite era; the European Space Agency (ESA) was launched in 1975 and satellite-to-cable television became prominent.

Satellite innovation, like so much in communications, was originally pioneered and funded by Washington (Fortner, 1993). The US also pioneered both satellite-to-cable and satellite direct-to-home television (Tunstall, 1986). During 1975-2005, the United States continued to be the world's leading television exporter – especially of entertainment programming and entertainment formats. Hollywood continued to be the world's leading exporter of theatrical movies (for theatres and television). These years also saw a big growth in higher priced American premium TV series.

By 1995, the median American home had about 40 TV channels (Tunstall & Machin, 1999). Meanwhile, in 1995, most of the world's households still had no TV channels at all. In affluent Europe, most households had only a very few channels in 1995; and even on these few channels, a sizeable slice of the content was American.

However, while Europeans suffered from media inequality in terms of quantity and choice, Europeans were perhaps being better and more equalled supplied with television. Public Service Broadcasting remained quite strong across much of Western Europe during 1975-2005 and Europe could see itself as the world leader in the television coverage of the world's most popular game – Association (or Soccer) Football.

Another source of communications ambiguity and paradox was the break-up of the Soviet Union and its old “empires” within the USSR and Eastern Europe. Some twenty “new nations” had arguably become more equal in political terms, but more socially unequal than previous to the USSR break-up. Moscow had perhaps contributed to its own demise by subsidising, across the USSR, Russian language as well as “national” language press, radio, TV and movie production. After 1990, 14 Non-Russian Republics – with a combined population of 140 million (1990) – lost their Moscow media subsidies. The most populous of these “new” (ex-USSR) countries in 1990 were Ukraine (52 million), Uzbekistan (20 million) and Kazakhstan (17 million). Russia, plus some other former USSR republics and some other East European countries, operated somewhat chaotic media import strategies, which in some cases involved importing Latin American TV soap operas (Tunstall 2008).

The Satellite era also had paradoxical (more equal and less equal) West European communications consequences, especially for smaller population and/or for less centrally located countries, facing a conflict between their “national” language and competing, smaller and more regional languages. Such countries included Spain, Belgium, Switzerland and Finland as well as several new and old countries in Eastern and South Eastern Europe.

News agency inequalities foreshadow internet inequalities

The world map of today’s internet, indicates large numbers of cables crossing, in particular the North Atlantic (especially from France and UK to the US), and spanning the North Pacific from the US West Coast to Japan, China and East Asia. There are big additional, heavily internet cabled, routes around Africa, around Latin America and around South Asia.

The world map of telegraph lines used by the news agencies around 1870 looked very similar. The first international submarine telegraph lines included Britain-France (1851) and Britain-USA-Canada (1866).

For most of the years 1860-1960, Britain and France were world leaders in telegraph connections, linking up their empires with imperial news agencies headquartered in Paris and London (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Boyd-Barrett & Palmer, 1981; Rantanen, 2009; Read, 1992).

The French agency (Havas and, from 1945, Agence France-Presse) and the British agency, Reuters, wanted to sell their news to domestic newspapers of differing political persuasions and to the newspapers of other nations and empires. These international news agencies not only invented fast news; they also developed “neutral” or “non-partisan” news. Havas began in 1835 with stock market news. Next came broader text news for newspapers. Much later still came photographs, radio news, television news, cable news and then the internet. The jump into TV news was especially costly because it often required expensive air travel within Asia or within Africa, as well as

expensive transmission technology and a TV news reporter was typically supported by a camera person and several others.

During the 1975-2005 Satellite Era, a combination of American, British and French news agencies continued to lead the world news agenda. But fresh competition emerged, for example from CNN and other specialized TV news operations. There were numerous additional news-by-satellite offerings from government owned-and-operated “external” broadcasters.

For most of 1975-2005, the provision of world news by satellite was led by the British Reuters and French AFP (Tunstall, 1992) with the United States in third place. The leading American agency, Associated Press (AP) was still owned by the American daily newspapers, whose owners did not want AP to become a TV news agency. This initially left the field of world news by satellite to the British Visnews – a joint enterprise of Reuters and the BBC. In 1975, Visnews was “the world’s leading supplier” of TV news, reaching (it claimed) 99 per cent of all TV receivers in the world (Tunstall, 1977: 23-35, 48-49). Visnews subsequently came to be fully owned by Reuters and was rebranded as “Reuters TV”. For at least twenty years after 1975, London continued to be the world leader but two American operations provided some competition. WTN (owned by the American UPI news agency and the British ITN) was based in London but struggled to compete, largely because UPI was losing in its overall competition against AP.

Associated Press (of New York) did eventually enter the Satellite era in 1983-84, when it began to distribute all of its domestic US news (text, picture, radio, TV) by satellite. When AP decided to enter international TV news, it located its APTV news operation in London; British personnel from Reuters played leading roles in this. During the 1990s, Reuters TV and APTV ran what might be called a comfortable duopoly of world TV news provision. In 1998, Reuters TV had contracts with 300 national TV networks. Each day it transmitted 16 major half hour news feeds around the world; news feeds that were accompanied by scripted material (Tunstall & Machin, 1999).

This Anglo-American duopoly (and the role of Europe in world news) altered dramatically around the turn of the century. If the news agency achievement circa 1900 was the “factualization” of news, the strategic agency change circa year 2000 was the “financialization” of news. Michael Bloomberg launched his on-screen financial data company in 1982 and opened a London office in 1987 (Tunstall & Machin, 1999). Reuters had some success in the 1970s in beefing up its computerized data services, but could not decide how to combine data and news across the media and across the world. Reuters was acquired by the Scottish-Canadian Thomson data company, and Thomson-Reuters, although headquartered in Toronto, has operated primarily from New York. Financial news and data became more central in the international news agency world, now dominated from New York by the trio of Associated Press, Bloomberg and Thomson Reuters.

Since the peak of the Satellite era in the 1980s, news in Euro-America and around the world has transformed the old C.P. Scott distinction between “facts are sacred,

comment is free". "Facts" have been considerably redefined in the direction of financial and computerized data; this works remarkably well in sports news as well as in financial, economic and business news.

The subsequent internet era has seen strategic changes in the old world of facts separate from comment. In Euro-America, radio and TV have become less characterized by public service and neutral news. As so often, the US has led the way; CNN and NBC news differ sharply from Fox News. Paradoxically, it could further be said that traditional elite "neutral" newspapers have – in opposition to more partisan news – themselves become more partisan.

In Euro-America and around the world, the internet era has created hundreds and thousands of fresh "news" offerings. But most of these "news" offerings (including some of the best known) make little effort (and put little finance into) gathering their own news. Instead, they mostly use old fashioned news from the international and (linked) national news agencies. Then, some kind of comment and opinion (perhaps described as "analysis") is, in practice, the main "news" offering.

More or less equality in the internet era?

The internet era seems to have increased communications inequalities. Across Euro-America, members of each national elite can subscribe to elite general and financial newspapers (paper and/or online versions) and can also subscribe to other expensive specialized national and international news services. Meanwhile many working-class people across Euro-America no longer read a daily paper or follow the national TV news, but may instead follow insurgent "news" offerings which are predominantly prejudice and comment, not news. Something similar, but more extreme, seems to be happening across the world. Governments across the world tend to be strong across old, new and internet media. In many countries, minorities (of language, religion and politics) try to "shout back" against the central government. But their shouting back may be even more partisan than the voices of the government. These minorities across many nations may be becoming even less well informed than previously. Inequality advances.

If the great majority of Europeans and Americans are using the internet and/or a smartphone on most days of the week, does this mean that we are becoming more equal? One of many new complexities is that, while the internet and the smartphone provide unprecedented quantities of material, even the most basic (and fast moving) numbers appear to be unreliable and contradictory.

There is a big difference between what is now available and what most people actually look at, read, and consume. Arguably we have become less equal because much of the material which comes towards us is actually directed by advertisers who have been studying our individual buying habits. Another obvious possibility is that the internet reveals the dazzling possibilities of wealth, education, consumption and leisure – but does little to help us acquire and achieve these things.

While Europe considers these and other problems, China and the USA have travelled further and much faster into the 5G and the internet era. China's tech giants – such as Alibaba, Baidu and Tencent – confront not European, but American, companies. China has its four-way New Silk Road to Europe project – by rail, by road, by sea (via Colombo in Sri Lanka and via Suez) – and of course by internet cable. The large cities of eastern China were the first in the world to adopt a nearly complete regime of cashless payment.

In terms of direct foreign investment and of Chinese citizens living outside China, the biggest single destination is the USA, followed by South East Asia, and Western Europe in third place. The next biggest destinations for Chinese influence are Canada, Japan, South Korea and Australia. Chinese financial investment in Africa, although much discussed, has been low.

The United States is still far ahead of China in exporting entertainment with its fresh combination of Hollywood and Silicon Valley and has developed new format services such as Netflix. We seem to have entered a period of an awkward America-China duopoly with America dominant in content while China increasingly leads in tech hardware.

This America-China duopoly is unpredictable, because it depends on many commercial, governmental, and security-intelligence issues. There has already been much mutual rivalry and suspicion and fresh areas of strategic rivalry are emerging – such as competition for supplies of cobalt (for batteries) from the unstable location of Congo.

In any discussion of increased equality or inequality, language is significant. The United States has an advantage with the English language and its use by educated elites around the world. Meanwhile, the Chinese government claims that 80 per cent or 90 per cent of the Chinese population, or over a billion Chinese people, speak Mandarin. This assertion depends upon at least ten Han languages being counted as Mandarin. In fact, the traditional language of Quandong is Cantonese and the traditional language of the Shanghai area is Wu. Current Chinese government policy is to absorb these ten separate Han languages into North East China Mandarin (The Economist, 2018). This project is comparable to a decision by the European Union to make Italian (with its ancient links to Latin) the sole language of education and government across Europe. Meanwhile Beijing is also claiming to be nurturing “tribal” languages such as Tibetan and Uighur. This language policy has been accompanied by conditions placed on communications imports from America. Google has had to submit to some Chinese censorship and Hollywood is only allowed to export three movies per month to China.

Meanwhile India probably supplies the biggest number of communications paradoxes (Tunstall, 2008). For example, the poor can influence the price of an elite newspaper: Some years ago, the elite Indian publication The Times of India considered becoming a free newspaper. However, it could not do so (the editor told this writer) because people in Indian cities who cannot afford either a flush toilet or toilet paper, use old newspapers as toilet paper. As a result, there is an active street market in yes-

terday's newspapers. Had The Times of India become a completely free newspaper, the city poor would have picked up the free newspapers each day for use as toilet paper.

Since the 1930s, India has had the world's largest output of theatrical movies. As recently as the late 1980s, India was annually producing 170 Hindi movies and an additional 580 movies in seven other languages. Leading actors and actresses typically starred in 200 or more movies during a long career. There are several traditional genres within Indian movies; a heavy focus on music, song and dance helps to span across different Indian languages. Since around 1970, television spread into hundreds of millions of Indian homes – and was then followed by the Internet and mobile phones.

In some respects, the movies, the newspapers and the internet may have helped many millions of Indians to feel more equal. But there is some evidence that Indian inequality has increased in the internet era. In the mid-1990s, India had only two dollar billionaires; two decades later it had over one hundred dollar billionaires. Income-per-head in India is about half the level in China. The caste system continues to be very significant in politics and in the old media. India still has its “tribals” and its “other backward castes”. Especially in mountainous East and North-East India, “tribal” people are in violent rebellion against coal and metal mining, logging companies, and the government.

In a 2018 study of young Indians, Snigdha Poonam points out that two thirds of India's 1.3 billion people are aged under 35 and provides strong evidence of both more and less Indian inequality in the Internet era. Many millions of young Indians have access to the Internet and/or smart phones, which enables them to see far beyond their own everyday shortage of cash and (often) lack of paid employment. They see spectacular extremes of wealth and poverty in Indian cities; they see what America, China, and Europe are doing, but they cannot participate. Their several hours a day of staring at screens seems to make many young Indians feel more, not less, unequal. And angry.

In Euro-America the young may also feel more unequal as the communications system tells them that yet another new kind of inequality derives from older people with money and younger people without a pay increase.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the media have always exhibited extreme scale economies and audience inequalities. The more recent social communications offerings exploit yet larger scale economies and are marked by yet larger audience/user inequalities. Increasingly, the old mass media and the newer online social media are merging into a single Silicon Valley plus Hollywood industry.

For 150 years, Europe has been slow to grasp American developments such as Washington and military finance for old and new media, bank finance for youthful entrepreneurs, rapid growth of new industry sectors, followed by massive exports

of the content and services to Europe and the world. The Silicon Valley companies quickly create new billionaires. The middle class subscribe to traditional mainstream media and can also subscribe to new big budget entertainment. Poorer people cannot afford all of this. Similar inequalities exist in Europe. Europe also faces an additional inequality in the increasing dependence on imports from the US Pacific coast, 10,000 kilometres away.

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Chapter 5

Political communication, digital inequality and populism

Stylianos Papathanassopoulos & Ralph Negrine

The proliferation of internet-based forms of communication has had a dramatic impact on the way in which societies, media and political actors act and interact in the twenty-first century. Political communication is changing, but it is unclear how the changes relate to concerns about inequalities in the media sphere. More critically, the contemporary communication landscape is challenging the study of political communication itself as new forces come to play a part in producing and transmitting messages across a whole range of media. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the conducting of political communication in the light of the current developments. The first part of the chapter explores aspects of the “transformation” of political communication whilst reflecting on questions of inequality. The second part focuses on populism, a subject that has considerably re-energized researchers and, more significantly, polities.

Contemporary societies are increasingly faced with situations in which the media have been transformed from mere channels of communication between interested parties into arenas of political engagement in which the media themselves are key actors in the political process. Whether they involve President Trump or negotiators in discussions about Brexit, Tweets have become not only bites of information but also part of a process of political, diplomatic and journalistic engagement. Moreover, such communication is no longer the preserve of those in the know, since it engages both political actors and the public. These two examples, and there are countless others, confront us with an urgent question: namely, how do we describe contemporary political communication practices? As we shall argue below, we are currently experiencing situations that take us beyond the (very recently) coined idea of the “hybrid media system” (Chadwick, 2013). Change has been so rapid in the last four years that we need to re-assess the accepted ideas of political communication and mediated communication that litter contemporary literature.

The aim of this chapter is to seek answers to questions relating to changes in the conducting of political communication and, in so doing, to touch on concerns about inequality in opportunities – economic, cultural and political – that can help us

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understand better the places that we now inhabit. The first part of this chapter will explore aspects of the “transformation” of political communication whilst reflecting on questions of inequality. The second part will discuss populism, a subject that has considerably re-energized researchers and, more significantly, polities.

The transformation of political communication

The proliferation of internet-based forms of communication has had a dramatic impact on the way in which societies, media and political actors act and interact in the twenty-first century. As Coleman and Blumler (2009) observed some years ago, “almost everything to do with political communication seems to be in flux nowadays: social formations and lifestyle, strategies of persuasion, politician–journalist relations, media technology, organisation and finance” (Coleman & Blumler, 2009: 43). Apart from the fact that societies are no longer as they were, these processes point to societies becoming increasingly made up of shifting alliances, groupings and collaborations, with the old certainties no longer in place. In such societies, the media – old and new, though the distinction no longer makes sense – become even more important as mechanisms of communication and mediators of the political system, of values, of morality, of ... almost everything.

Nevertheless, writing about change in this generalized way probably minimizes the extent of the impact of the internet and the need for researchers to look beyond the old questions to appreciate the challenge of the new. We need, as Henry Farrell (2012) notes, to appreciate that, “as the Internet becomes politically normalized, it will be ever less appropriate to study it in isolation but ever more important to think clearly, and carefully, about its relationship to politics” (Farrell, 2012: 47). One way of achieving this is perhaps to move beyond the distinctions between old and new media, even beyond the notion of the “hybrid media system” (Chadwick, 2013), by acknowledging the normalization of the internet in all communication processes. Communication, in the contemporary age, takes place across many platforms, albeit some more public than others, and is produced by a number of diverse actors, some institutional but many not. Just as we no longer truly convincingly separate the press from television when studying news, we should no longer seek to separate them from the newer platforms that are constantly emerging.

If that is now the case, do older models of political communication still have some purchase on contemporary life? Was the age of “mass media” a fleeting moment, no longer representative of current forms of production and consumption? How do we refocus older concerns in such a way as to take in newer ones, or do we have to abandon the old and start afresh? Is this the Fourth Age of communication, perhaps?¹ Are we

1. Jay Blumler and Dennis Kavanagh (1999) wrote variously on the three ages of political communication. When the first version of the paper was published in 1999, the internet was young. It represented the Third Age. Are we beyond that now?

beyond the “hybrid media system” in that “the interrelationships between older and newer media logics” (Chadwick, 2013: 5) that were central to it have been normalized?

Daniel Kreiss, who studied American presidential campaigns, offers his own way of understanding the significance of contemporary changes and the importance of studying aspects of campaigning in their (new) totality. In respect to one aspect of this newer research agenda, specifically how to think about what we formerly referred to as “audiences” in media research, he writes:

As scholars begin to think more broadly about participation to include citizens’ creation, distribution, and interaction with political content online it seems clear that we lack firm categories for many contemporary aspects of political communication. For instance, how should scholars conceptualize retweets or sharing campaign content through Facebook, actions that are low cost and perhaps not even done with much forethought but that may be highly meaningful or consequential forms of political speech in terms of inadvertent exposure ...? Finally, how do people encounter, create, and express public opinion in everyday life away from institutional political settings ..., but with implications for campaigns? (Kreiss, 2015: 132)

This is not the only area in which developments have forced researchers to rethink categories and concepts. Kreiss’s reflection also draws our attention to the ways in which research agendas need to depart from the earlier conceptualization of the processes of political communication. Another good example of this need is the current interest in data analytics, which has shone a light on the uses of the media (especially “new” media) to reach individuals with targeted information. This is what happened in the 2016 US presidential campaign and in the 2016 British (Brexit) referendum (see Cadwallader, 2017). The implications of these developments in data analytics are many – though not considered here – but one area is particularly relevant in the context of this chapter, namely that of universal access to communication.

Prior to the normalization of the internet, those who looked at aspects of political communication worked on a generally accepted assumption that access to the content of political communication was, more or less, universally available. British television election broadcasts or interviews in newspapers were openly available to all voters. Voters might read different newspapers or watch different channels, but all the content was available freely or at a low cost. Politicians who sought to persuade the public would use public means to reach the (mass) public, and this available content was the content that researchers analysed in their studies of communication in the course of election campaigns.

Developments in communication over the internet have completely overhauled this, admittedly simplified, version of political communication. Not only are institutional actors not the only communicators but, more significantly, the ability of institutional (and other) communicators to target individuals means that there is no longer a shared corpus of political communications. An activist might readily engage in canvassing and may wish to discuss with voters what they have seen on television services or in their

newspapers, but she can no longer assume that they have not accessed other information via their screens: information that might have been made available only to them.

In other words, the developments of Web 2.0 have paradoxically given rise to the promise of equality of access for all and, at the same time, to the targeting of some information to the few. This poses interesting questions regarding the promise of the Internet in respect of some older concerns amongst media scholars about the structures of media systems that restricted access to information and to diverse sources of information.

Such concerns are elaborated by Denis McQuail (in this volume, chapter 2) at various points in his later writings, and he provided a useful summary to which we can turn for some clarification. Briefly, he pointed out how “the variety of forms of media (in)equality that exist is matched by a variety of instruments of policy”. Put differently, policies have often been designed to address specific issues relating to concerns about inequality in forms of media. The goals that he lists – and there are others – are as follows (McQuail, this volume, chapter 2):

- more equal access to the means of production and transmission;
- universal service and net neutrality;
- more equal representation in content;
- more equal distribution of reliable and relevant information amongst the public;
- more equal rights to autonomy in media matters for groups defined by culture, language or region, in resistance to hegemonic media influences
- more equal access as audiences to diverse sources and forms of provision;
- more equal ability to have the communication equipment needed to enjoy the benefits now available to many but not all.

If we imagine the pre-internet media age, we can make sense of these goals and the policy responses designed to ensure, for example, “more equal access as audiences to diverse sources” or “more equal representation of content”. At election times, this would involve regulations to ensure that audiences were exposed to all the political points of view (albeit in proportion to the political strength of the parties, say). To enable this, the media would act as intermediaries to ensure that no particular groups dominated and/or that those contesting elections were properly and fairly interrogated.

While these goals remain worthwhile on many levels, they are no longer meaningful in the same ways. Consider the recent 2016 US presidential election or the 2017 British general election. In both elections, social media – for example Facebook and Twitter – played important parts in communicating political messages. Yet, in contrast to, say, the British broadcast media, social media are not regulated regarding what they can/cannot transmit. Neither Facebook nor Twitter behave as publishers, editors or journalistic organizations. The rules for these platforms are very different, and,

perhaps more significantly, the mainstream/traditional media are no longer the only sources of information available to the public. On the one hand, then, the internet has opened up the conversation to a whole new range of sources, but, on the other hand, those sources no longer need to pay attention to rules or regulations about fairness and objectivity or even truthfulness.

In this newer environment, the goal that audiences should have the freedom to access a whole range of diverse content equally has been achieved. In practice, though, research has suggested that audiences do not turn to a diverse set of sources but are wedded to a few – and more significantly, to sources that align with their views. According to the most recent Reuters Institute research:

In a sample of six countries (US, UK, Ireland, Germany, Spain, and Australia), we found that over a third of social media users (37%) followed at least one politician or political party. Across countries, people who do follow politicians are most likely to follow a politician or party of the left (20%), followed by the centre (16%), while those on the right tend to get less attention (12%). This difference can partly be explained by age, given that younger groups who use social media heavily tend to be left aligned. High levels of political following in the United States (54%) reflect over a decade of using digital and social media in political campaigning, but it is still striking that they are twice the levels seen in Germany (25%). We tend to follow politicians we agree with; respondents on the left are five times more likely to follow left-leaning politicians on social media than politicians from the right. The same is true in reverse in equal proportion. (Reuters, 2017: 16-17)

This suggests that following politicians on social media may contribute to greater polarization. On the other hand, we should remember that, in the pre-digital age, political activists would have spent a considerable amount of time with people who held similar views as well. What is different is the scale of this activity. Over half of social media users (54%) in the United States follow politicians, which amounts to around a third of the entire US online population (Reuters, 2017: 16-17). This points to a level of polarization that might hitherto have lain dormant: there may not have been triggers to bring these differences to the fore. Whether this is part of an explanation for the rise of populism will be considered further below. It does, however, reflect another emerging trend, that is, polarization in the use of mainstream/traditional media. As the Reuters Report also notes:

The resulting map for the United States ... shows a deeply polarized media landscape, which reflects an equally polarized society. The websites of TV networks like ABC, NBC, and CBC are used far more by people who self-identify as left-wing, along with the New York Times and Washington Post. By contrast the Fox News and Breitbart websites are mostly used by people with right-wing views. Arguably the gap on the right of this map has provided space or a range of hyper-partisan right-wing sites to emerge over the last few years. The map shows just online sites, but we should

remember that polarization also exists in the print and TV markets. Two-thirds of right-wingers watch the Fox News TV channel but only 11 per cent of those who identify on the left. (Reuters, 2017: 20)

European countries do not display similar features, as the authors observed, but they do add that “the polarizing Brexit debate (in Britain) has increased distrust in the mainstream media generally from those on both ends of the debate, with the BBC particularly under fire” (Reuters, 2017: 21). If one adds to this the recent headlines in the press on this topic (Pells, 2016), the sense of a national split reflected by media discourse or, conversely, media discourse engendering a national split remains true. Views online – uncontrolled, unmediated and unfiltered – may not have helped to create a safe, or indeed any, space for considered and deliberative debate.

Adding concerns about “fake news” and resorting to shouts of “fake news” by those who do not wish to be challenged, as well as questions about the levels of trust in the media, one begins to see how the landscape of political communication has been convulsed. Put differently, the “public spaces” that the traditional broadcast media used to provide for discussion and conversation – the idealistic arrangement of a stable and comfortable social democratic system/public sphere – have been invaded by the hordes. The barbarians are not at the gates but inside the citadel!

The implications of this unfettered, uncontrolled freedom of access to all content and freedom for making all content freely available irrespective of truthfulness challenges the validity of the goals outlined by Denis McQuail. It is no longer simply about making things available to all but rather about tempering what is available and ensuring that the core purposes of responsible media/journalism are maintained and supported. Neither is easy to achieve in Western political systems that usually shy away from tinkering too heavily with media systems or offering a helping hand to journalistic enterprises. This implies that more traditional approaches to these problems are unlikely to succeed. In chapter 3 in the present volume, Hannu Nieminen concludes that

... the solution offered by the elites to solve the crisis of trust, echoed by the legacy media, is not to provide new measures that would radically tackle the *real sources of inequality* (Arrese & Vara, 2015). What they suggest are more or less already existing means and instruments; this time, however, they are intended to appear more convincing and capable. The key words pointing to policy reforms, in both the market and the public institutions, include “responsible leadership”, “social inclusion”, “better governance” and “media literacy”, and addressing the global risks effectively requires “(...) responsive and responsible leadership with a deeper commitment to inclusive development and equitable growth, both nationally and globally” (WEF, 2017: 4). In sum, the cure offered is to appeal to the elites’ moral and ethical obligations instead of proposing the necessary reforms to the power-related structures that actively produce inequality and polarization. (Emphasis added) (Nieminen, this volume, chapter 3)

However, it is absolutely not clear what “the real sources of inequality” are. If they lie outside the media field, media policies are likely to have little impact. After all, over

half a century of responsible journalism and media has led us to a point at which polarization rather than consensus seems to be the order of the day. The “sources of inequality” may lie in the distribution of economic and political resources, as people have always suspected. In that case, the media are simply reaping the consequences of inequalities elsewhere, and discussions of media policies with respect to issues of equality/inequality are secondary. Such a conclusion is not very far from the one arrived at by Denis McQuail. Having set out the issues, he writes: “The underlying trends of media today are profoundly unsettling and require re-examination of our normative goals and assumptions” (see McQuail chapter 2 in this volume). As he concludes:

What remains necessary and steadily more elusive is the more equal distribution of public communication that has qualities of transparency, non-exploitation and reliability as well as diversity and relevance. Such a goal does not look attainable, except by structural provision, guaranteed by democratic control, itself equally unlikely. In the end we are back with the two narratives mentioned at the start, one the technological and the other a matter of human agency. Technology seems to be running ahead of purpose, strongly driven by global market forces. (McQuail, this volume, chapter 2)

In this new landscape, researchers, the public, “old” media and political actors have had to adapt to the emergence of the “new” media: political actors no longer have sole control over the agenda, and “old” media are no longer the only means of message dissemination (and agenda building). The emergence of the internet pushed developments in a direction that had hitherto only been imagined. Political communication no longer needed to be *mass* communication but could be targeted to individuals as well as groups; it could be direct and not mediated by traditional professional journalists; it could be interactive; it could be plentiful, since there was no restriction on the supply; it could be peer to peer; and so on. Nevertheless, as noted above in the quote from Daniel Kreiss, the elements of unpredictability in the new environment, as well as the newer forms of political and economic control over message construction and dissemination (through such things as data-driven and targeted posts and emails), not only mean that older models and questions need reframing but that new ones need to be formulated (rapidly).

The degree to which the entry of the internet has transformed and professionalized the nature and content of political communication is indeed a question of great contemporary significance. To answer it, we must take a very wide perspective on the subject and accept that our ability to grapple with any more than a small part of the whole will make any answer of limited general value. As newspapers and television provide news alongside websites, Facebook and Tweets, we become aware of the public side of communication and the private side of communication to individual screens. We can easily grasp and study the public side, but it is more difficult to study the private one and the interactions between the two. Nonetheless, the need to adopt an imaginative strategy of research is more important than ever.

Old and new inequalities

As we have seen in the discussion of media inequalities above, there are concerns about the source of these inequalities and the policy approaches that may be needed to address them. We have noted, for instance, that the ways in which the public can access content via the internet create a much more level playing field, since an internet connection enables access to an infinite amount of content. At the same time, following Kreiss's comments above, the place of the public in the communication process has changed quite dramatically. Inequalities related to this dimension are no longer as fixed (McQuail & Windahl, 1981: 93) and no longer pose obstacles to different forms of communication, at least not in the same way. The advent of the internet offered the potential to overcome all of these obstacles. As Kristof Jacobs and Niels Spierings (2016: 7) put it:

Proponents of the *equalization thesis* suggest that new technologies such as social media level the playing field and redistribute the power balance in favour of previously disadvantaged parties ... Regarding social media, the core argument is that social media are (1) cheaper, (2) require less expertise, and (3) allow disadvantaged parties and candidates to bypass traditional media ... Furthermore, it has been claimed that its *interactive* nature and its possibility of *anonymity* also benefit marginalized groups. [Emphasis added by author]

Denis McQuail also noted this point when he wrote that:

the potential of new media to bypass established institutional channels does also seem to improve the chances for the many and reduce their dependence on the various monopolistic sources of information and influence. ... The political voices that have urged us to develop the "electronic highway" into homes, libraries, schools and workplaces see this as an emancipatory programme of action as well as a necessity for economic progress. (McQuail, 2010: 156)

However, the new media have not transformed the media world in terms of the social stratification of ownership and access. In effect, rather than creating more competition, they have created new and immensely powerful monopolists, like Google, Facebook and Amazon (Keen, 2015). Jacobs and Spierings (2016) summarized the *normalization thesis*, noting that new technologies "merely reinforce existing inequalities", since "(1) online technologies simply replicated old power inequalities because larger parties have *strategic departments*; (2) already powerful politicians are generally better campaigners and more *professional*, and thus better at taking advantage of new technologies; and (3) leading political actors tend to have the resources and *motivation*" (2016: 7).

According to Christian Fuchs (2014), stratification patterns created by age, ethnicity and class shape the use of digital media and cause information gaps to widen rather than narrow. As he points out:

The hypothesis of the end of information inequality (what is in a misleading way often called the "digital divide") due to the rapid adoption of the internet ... is a

myth. Stratification no longer so much concerns physical access to the internet, but rather the use of this technology and the skills required for this use. As long as there is a stratified society, information inequality will exist. (Fuchs, 2014: 190)

This also applies to communication in the world of politics. As Curran and colleagues (2012) remind us, people who actively participate in politics can be untypical of the general population, which can influence the nature of online discourse. It is well known today that the politically active tend to be drawn from the higher socio-economic groups, the more highly educated and older people. Recently, evidence has also emerged of a “second-level” democratic divide that concerns the differences between those who actively use the Web for politics and those who do not (Min, 2010). In effect, there are various levels of divides in the age of digitally mediated communication (Mansell, 2017; Robinson et al., 2015). For example, those engaged in political online participation are even more skewed towards the affluent and highly educated than those engaged offline, though they are more often younger (Morris & Morris, 2013). Hindman (2009) showed that the news dominance of white middle-class men extends from traditional newsrooms to online news sites and the entire blogosphere of political communication. As he notes, “ultimately, blogs have given a small group of educational, professional, and technical elite’s new influence in US politics. Blogs have done far less to amplify the political voice of average citizens” (Hindman, 2009: 103). Accordingly, Di Gennaro and Dutton (2006) stress that the internet seems to be promoting political exclusion rather than inclusion. The increasing media choice has not diminished the inequality in knowledge about political information and political knowledge among different groups in society (Aalberg et al., 2013). Prior (2007) also argues that, although there is more media choice, this at the same time allows for easier avoidance of political information among those who are not interested, leading to less accidental exposure to news, less political knowledge and, as a consequence, the exclusion of the unmotivated from democratic politics (Aelst et al., 2017; Prior, 2007).

It would be a mistake to draw a distinction between better and worse forms of participation and engagement over time, since these things inevitably change and have different meanings across different eras. However, recent political upheavals, such as the rise of populist movements and electoral upsets (e.g. Brexit and Trump), suggest that the nature and impacts of communication in “the hybrid media system” have challenged the understanding of the way in which politics operates. We explore this in the next section.

Social media and the rise of populist political communication

Changes in the media have occasioned responses in political parties and in the ways in which they have come to use the media for their own ends – be they electoral campaigning or other forms of public communication, for example diplomacy. As the architecture of the internet creates numerous possibilities for citizens and voters (and

trolls!) to play a part in politics, politicians, political parties and those aligned to them overtly or covertly (for instance, see the case of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica) as well as political communication practices have tried to adjust to the new environment. Political actors, defined broadly, have once again attempted to find and utilize “effective means of persuasion”. As has been argued elsewhere (see Negrine, 2008), there has been a greater degree of professionalism in the ways in which all organizations have sought to deploy the media, old or new, for their uses. A more proactive media strategy is probably typical of all organizations as they continue to employ armies of public and media relations professionals to mediate (control, “spin”, “leak”, spread and target) content. This argument can be extended to incorporate the use of internet-based services, such as Twitter and Facebook (see Kreiss, 2015; McGregor et al., 2017). Social movements, for example, have found the internet useful as a means of building support and encouraging direct action (Bennett, 2003). However, as Fuchs (2014) notes:

... social media do not cause revolutions or protests. They are embedded into contradictions and the power structures of contemporary society. This also means that in society, in which these media are prevalent, they are not completely unimportant in situations of uproar and revolution. Social media have contradictory characteristics in contradictory societies: they do not necessarily and automatically support/amplify or dampen/limit rebellions, but rather pose contradictory potentials that stand in contradiction with influences by the state, ideology, capitalism and other media. (Fuchs, 2014: 207)

In one way or another, today’s election campaigns inevitably include a social media campaign. Jason Gainous and Kevin M. Wagner (2013: 3) argue that social media present an “entirely new paradigm” for the relationship between politicians and the public, one with a “new set of rules and codes” (ibid.). Paolo Gerbaudo (2018) remarks that “social media has favoured the rise of populist movements also because of the aggregation logic embedded in its algorithms and the way it can focus the attention of an otherwise dispersed people” (Gerbaudo, 2018: 5). In practice, political actors (such as Donald Trump after his election in 2016) can express their views on thorny socioeconomic and political issues without the filtering enacted by the professional and ethical rules of the traditional mass media. Whether such activities on Twitter are deemed to be successful – a matter of contention – will depend on the followers, the emotional content of the Tweet, its propensity to go viral and a host of other criteria. The unpredictability of the process of diffusion makes internet-based communication a challenge to study and assess.

These different ways of connecting people, organizations and new practices mean that “political communication” in the digital age can take many forms and be viewed from a number of different perspectives. One constant across many Western democratic societies, though, is the growing disconnect between political parties and the public, so much so that party membership has declined substantially over the last few decades.

In this context, social media provide an opportunity for political actors to subvert traditional gatekeeping forces from the mass media and instead craft a targeted message directly for the members of the public who are more receptive to their messages (Gainous & Wagner, 2013). In other words, parties – perhaps more accurately the leaders of parties – can communicate directly with followers or prospective followers. Still, the closed world of political communication of yesteryear has been opened up to elements that have disrupted the established ways of seeing and understanding communication processes. In the age of Web 2.0, new methods of interaction provide a new type of public space that has dramatically changed party politics. “This includes not only the modernisation and professionalisation of mainstream political parties, but also paves the way for new challengers and a new dimension of campaigning” (Hartleb, 2013: 135).

Some of those challengers have come from outside established political parties or their hierarchies, such as Donald Trump in the US, Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, Le Pen in France and Beppe Grillo in Italy. Like others who have appealed directly to voters over the heads of the established party structures, their appeal has been based on directly engaging with people and promising to meet their needs. They have often been described as “populist” in their appeal and “style” (see Block & Negrine, 2016; Moffit, 2016). Engesser and colleagues (2017) identify five definitional elements of populism: emphasizing the sovereignty of the people, advocating for the people, attacking the elite, ostracizing others and invoking the “heartland”. Others have emphasized similar elements, including an appeal to “the people” (Laclau, 2005; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014); an anti-politics, anti-elitist, anti-establishment ideology, sentiments and tactics (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017); a “language” or “discourse” characterized by a confrontational, anti-establishment ethos and colloquial language that provide a sense of closeness between leaders and their public (Hawkins, 2010; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007); a focus on (a usually charismatic) party “leadership” and “agency” to situate, popularize and legitimize populist issues (van Kessel, 2011); exploiting crises of democratic representation to acquire positions of power (Taggart, 2002); patronage, paternalism and party clientelism, especially in Latin America (Philip & Panizza, 2011); and a complex and fractious relationship with the media (Mazzoleni, 1987). While all political actors may be prone to critiquing elites and the political establishment, populists “claim that they, and only they, represent the people” (Müller, 2016: 3).

Even though populism could be regarded as a style of political communication that might be employed by every party, in effect, populist ideas and rhetoric have gained momentum all around the globe as populist politicians have come to realize that social media are important tools for their political goals (Cranmer, 2011: 299). In this sense, social media have provided new methods for political communication, which populists and populist parties can exploit (Aalberg et al., 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that “at the communication level” – we would argue, at all levels – “populism is not a homogenous form of ideological expression, but a complex

interplay between individual strategies, contexts, and party memberships” (Cranmer, *ibid.*). In a similar vein, the populist style of communication is less and less connected to the right/left political cleavage but rather the result of a varied combination of gradations that mix with different individual aspects of the leader’s style, a style that undoubtedly incorporates the communication possibilities of all the media, including social media (Bracciale & Martella, 2017).

Arguably, one way in which populist leaders can continue to claim to represent “the people” is by adopting communication strategies that reach the public in an unmediated fashion as well as in a way that enhances their position as populist leaders. In Trump’s inauguration speech, we find a populist appeal to the people: “Today we are not just transferring power from one administration to another ... but we are transferring power from Washington, DC, and giving it back to you, *the people*” (The White House, 2017). In effect, this is achieved by appealing to “the people” and adopting what Moffitt refers to as the demonstration of bad manners and the rejection of political conventions (Moffitt, 2016: 43-45). In such ways, populists disregard the “normal” and the correct in their critique of elites.

How extensively *other* populist politicians use social media to communicate and the factors that influence their activities have rarely been examined in great detail (see Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). President Trump has certainly used Twitter extensively – whilst neglecting more traditional means of political communication – but the Twitter practices of other leaders have been much less documented (Block & Negrine, 2016). We have yet to see a comprehensive analysis of the social media usage of a significant number of populist leaders before we can produce anything more than generalities. In this respect, President Trump may be unique rather than the general rule and his style very much contingent on his personality, preferences and peccadillos.

More generally, it is likely that, as de Vreese and colleagues (2018: 424) note:

Populism might broaden the attention for issues that are not in the mainstream news. Populism might mobilize groups of people that have felt on the fringe of the political system. Populism might improve the responsiveness of the political system by making actors and parties align their policies more with the “wishes of the people”.

It is necessary to add that populists can influence the agendas of other political actors as they too seek to address the wishes and desires of “the people”. An example of this is the ways in which an anti-immigration, anti-(EU) elite stance moved from the margins of UKIP to the Brexit campaign in the 2016 referendum in Britain.

There is some debate around the issue of whether economic inequality is the principal reason for the rise of populism. Many have pointed out that “those left behind” because of the pursuit of globalization, who have suffered in the process, have tended to support political leaders who have been critical of established institutions. In this respect, those who have not benefitted from economic changes – that is, those who have suffered economically – have shied away from established parties. However, others have argued that “populism is a socio-cultural and identity

phenomenon more than a socio-economic one” (Goodhart, 2017: 51-52) and that populism therefore requires a different sort of analysis, particularly as it relates to appeals to the voting public. Targeted appeals to voters, especially on social media, might be more successful if they adopt the anti-elitist/anti-establishment strands that are regularly incorporated into populist approaches to politics. In other words, social media – largely unregulated and disruptive – can aid appeals to cultural and political identities compared with the more “rational” and discursive discussions so beloved of politicians of yesteryear. Much research remains to be carried out along these lines as more and more information emerges from studies of behind-the-scenes work by web campaigners for some political groups. One outcome, amongst many, of these changes and the different forms of appeal that have made populism more mainstream is the negative consequences for liberal democracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). “Populism can use an electoral mandate to erode independent institutions that are considered cornerstones of liberal democracies like the courts or the free media” (de Vreese et al., 2018: 424). This in turn allows a counternarrative to be established – a narrative that challenges the traditional media for providing “fake news”. In these scenarios, populist leaders – and their supporters – challenge the “elitist media” for being self-centred and narrowly focused on an agenda that ignores or overlooks the immediate concerns of those who have long been forgotten. Thus, issues such as immigration or overweening international control of states, which traditional media have tended to shy away from, become organizing principles for populists. Their claim to represent the people runs right through their appeals.

It is no coincidence that, in his farewell speech, former US President Barack Obama, regarded by many as the “first social media president” (Katz et al., 2013), warned that social media are an existential threat to democracy because of their ability to divide and sow dissent:

For too many of us, it’s become safer to retreat into our own bubbles, whether in our neighbourhoods or on college campuses, or places of worship, or especially our social media feeds, surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook and never challenge our assumptions. The rise of naked partisanship, and increasing economic and regional stratification, the splintering of our media into a channel for every taste – all this makes this great sorting seem natural, even inevitable. And increasingly, we become so secure in our bubbles that we start accepting only information, whether it’s true or not, that fits our opinions, instead of basing our opinions on the evidence that is out there. (CNN, 2016)

How, therefore, to recreate a more civil citizenry and more civil forms of citizen participation, without fracturing the forms of democracy that have existed in Western societies in recent decades, remains the key question for all.

Concluding remarks

Communication scholars face many challenges ahead as the old fractures and the new disruptions present a whole range of new problems. Much of the communication environment is dominated by a focus on celebrity, rumour and populist attacks, with populist politicians proving to be sometimes unpredictable and opportunistic. Legacy media are attacked as “fake news”, and the levels of distrust and cynicism are high. At the same time, politics is presented to the public as a cynical game (Gurevitch et al., 2009). Traditional parties appear to have lost their bearings. Citizens, often on the fringes of discussions of political communication, have more media choices, but those are not necessarily any better than the previous ones. More significantly, the differences that have surfaced amongst the electorates may have become structural, such as those between different (identity) groups (Brexiters and Remainers, liberals against the far right or Trump supporters and non-Trump supporters).

The challenges for the future are not only structural – as they have always been – but consist in looking for ways to ensure the continued survival of some form of democratic process that is both inclusive and unified: a system of politics that allows for all voices to be heard in a civil manner; a system of politics in which communication in a robust journalistic fashion is not simply deemed to be “fake news” to feed distrust.

Contemporary political communication is thus facing challenges from a number of directions. It needs to be constructive in pointing out the challenges to robust forms of communication, which deny the possibilities of truthful and honest reporting and feed divisions that encourage uncivil dissent. Political communication needs to be in a form that can allow for divisions, but not such divisions that can lead to possibilities of harm. It must be remembered, though, that political communication is something that the media do undertake. Therefore, it is mandatory for the media to provide the space for a civil form of communication.

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Chapter 6

Economic inequality, appraisal of the EU and news media

Barbara Thomass

The chapter explores how economic inequality, attitudes towards the EU and the provision of news act together. It starts from the assumption that attitudes towards the EU are related to economic inequality. This assumption is tested by juxtapositions between opinions about the EU and indicators of inequality. The concept of information detriment is used to explain the implications of media markets with respect to the coverage of European issues. The chapter concludes that information detriment adds to the situation of inequality and feeds into the non-appraisal of the EU and the lack of a feeling of belonging to the EU.

The European Union is in a miserable state. The centrifugal forces are stronger than any forces of integration. Right-wing populism is promising that a nation built on homogeneous ethnos augurs better living conditions than the construction of diverse nations. Separatism seems to be the trend, as the developments in Cataluña, Scotland, Venetia and Lombardy show. Anti-European or anti-liberal parties have achieved great gains in elections in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, the United Kingdom is in the process of leaving the EU and other parties are working towards an exit. Greece is flirting with China, and EU candidate countries in Southeastern Europe are opening their markets to this big player in Asia. Studying European citizens' opinions about the EU in view of this situation will give insights into the problematic situation.

The ongoing debates on Europe are less a multitude of voices than a polarization between forces wanting to return to the ideal of an enclosed and coddled national identity and those still hoping that the EU can survive as a framework in which national well-being has better chances. The dispute between the two is strident: homeland, identity, culture, security and national sovereignty are the buzzwords of those who think of globalization as a fighting zone, where the threatened nation has to be defended. On the other hand, there are visionaries who want a renewed EU that will protect the citizens against the impositions of globalization. This situation gives rise to many questions. Does the public opinion about the EU reflect the polarized discourse? What are the underlying reasons for this polarization? Does this polarization

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find an equivalent in the existing and ever-growing inequalities? How do economic disparity and inequality translate into opinions about the EU, and which role do the media play in this respect?

The overarching research question of this book concerns the way and the extent to which the media and communications contribute to inequalities. This chapter answers that question with respect to differences in attitudes towards the EU, which in turn – this is the working hypothesis – correspond to economic inequalities. The question asked in the chapter is the following: Do the attitudes about the EU reflect the economic inequality in Europe and how do the media contribute to these attitudes? To explore the relation between economic welfare and views of the EU, we consider the media to play an important role and focus especially on the digital media. We argue that the information detriment, especially when it comes to the EU, is linked to inequality in society and has an effect on the perception of European polity and policies.

To elaborate this argumentation, the first section refers to the concept of information detriment resulting in “citizen detriment”, as presented by Golding (2017). Golding argues that inequality in access to and ownership of communication resources affects the capacity to be an informed citizen. The second section gathers empirical data about economic inequality within and between the EU member states. Third, we elaborate why opinions about the EU matter. This is followed by empirical evidence concerning the opinions of European citizens about the EU. On these grounds, we seek relations between opinions about the EU and indicators of inequality in the fifth section of the chapter. To explain the results, we refer to findings about the news supply, including the digital news supply, and put forward the information detriment hypothesis as a possible explanation.

Communicative inequality and European coverage

In his conceptual chapter about media and equality, Denis McQuail raises the question of which effects the media have on the distribution of “knowledge” and the positive expectation that they could raise the general level of knowledge and reduce the differences in knowledge. His claim that “citizens need to be widely and sufficiently informed on public issues of contemporary relevance and being able to follow and take part in society wide debates or conversations” is relevant to the greater political space that has emerged within the EU as well. In terms of quality information and with respect to Europe, this was an expectation that is still maintained, although the media performance, as we will see, is far from living up to it.

Golding (2017) puts citizenship at the centre of his reflections on the relation of communications, inequality and social order and states that mainstream media fail to provide information that enables active citizenship. He argues that, despite the abundance of information available online, there is growing inequality of access to quality information and that this information detriment translates into a citizen detriment.

Golding further centres his argumentation on the ideal of a participating, informed citizen and searches for impediments to this condition that obstruct the possibility of fair participation. Therefore, a key question becomes whether the media, in their various forms, provide the means for fair participation. This is relevant not only on the national level but on the European level as well. We will use Golding's concept to determine whether an information detriment can be detected on the European level and what consequences it has for the formation of opinions about the European Union, its policies and the feeling of belonging that people have towards the EU.

Research on political communications during electoral times, allows Golding to extract five explanations for why the media have failed to provide sufficient information for an informed citizenship (Golding, 2017: 4308f):

- coverage is limited to a range of issues that are dominated by some,
- especially broadcast coverage reduces political quotes or material to a sound bite format,
- “the horse race preoccupation”, meaning that the latest polling results and the performance of political parties and actors are made more important than substantive aspects of the messages and issues at the heart of the political debate,
- the partisanship displayed by the newspaper coverage with a dominance of pro-Conservative coverage,
- personalization, which accounts for greater interest in the personalities and people in the political game than in the policies, processes and institutions behind them.

If we transfer these arguments to the European level, there is ample evidence about the coverage of European issues. Most of the research about European media coverage has been interested in whether something that can be called a European public sphere exists. However, the findings are as valuable to exploring whether European citizens have access to comprehensive reporting on European issues or not.

Reviewing the research about how Europe is reported in the media, the diagnosis has never been a positive one. In general, EU coverage is scarce (de Vreese, 2002; Machill et al., 2006). Serious debates, which are more difficult to cover, are dealt with in an inappropriate way. For example, the case of the Transatlantic Trade and investment Partnership (TTIP) only came to light for a broader audience after massive activities of NGOs. EU-related issues are mostly too complex to find their way easily into national news. Selling news consists of talking heads and pictures, and the EU, with its complex and non-transparent decision-making procedures, can be reduced to these even less than national politics. Public service broadcasting performs a better job of reporting on the EU than most of the commercial broadcasters (Thomass, 2011).

The limited range of issues that Golding finds in research results about national news is a ubiquitous phenomenon in European news coverage as well. This is true

especially as it is mostly conflict and conflict alone that brings European issues into national – and, more seldom, regional – newscasts. Various case studies have shown that European issues become prominent in the media when they concern scandals or conflicts or when a well-focused event happens, such as European Council summits or elections (de Vreese et al., 2012; Engesser et al., 2014; Pfetsch & Heft, 2009; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The limited range of issues dramatically became obvious with the financial crisis of 2008, as its longstanding pre-developments had been neglected/ignored by almost all of the news media (Hepp et al., 2013; Möller, 2013; Offerhaus et al., 2014). In addition, national political themes and a domestic scope dominate media coverage of the European Parliament (EP) election campaign, while European issues are not present at all (Kovár & Kovár, 2012).

The reduction of political quotes or material to short sound bites, if reported at all, has also been documented in the European coverage (Kevin, 2003). This – in combination with the observed personalization, which overemphasizes personalities over policies, processes and institutions – is especially relevant to European coverage, as European politics takes place in a complex, multilayer setting in which decisive developments occur within negotiations (Erbe & Koopmanns, 2004).

Similar to national elections, Hanretty and Banducci (2016) observe a horse race preoccupation in European elections, especially in close elections and polarized party systems. They find that, in member states with pro-EU governments, media outlets even increase the occurrence of horse race news.

Blunt pro-Europeanness is an issue that plays into the point about partisanship displayed by the newspaper coverage that Golding observed. In the European context, it means that the majority of Brussels-based journalists embrace the position that the EU is a positive structure (Statham, 2007, 2008).

These findings considered together mean that there is a striking imbalance regarding European politics and the amount of coverage that it attains for the ordinary media user. Using Golding's argument, we can identify an information detriment with respect to the media coverage of European issues. We will see later whether digital media can make a difference in the news repertoire concerning Europe.

Inequality in the EU – Empirical evidence

The concept of inequality laid out in the introductory chapter reveals the manifold dimensions and aspects that can be analysed. We concentrate on economic inequality, as it produces many other forms of inequality as consequences. With respect to states as the unit of analysis, inequality may refer to the differences either between nation states or within a given nation state.

Several studies reveal differences in income and prosperity that have become aggravated in the EU in the years to date (European Commission, n.d.; Oxfam, 2015). Three indicators have been used to identify the differences between the EU member

states: the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, the unemployment rate and the Gini coefficient.

Looking at the GDP per capita as an indicator of the general wealth of a country (Table 1), we find a group of eleven countries above the European average of €32,700, which is indexed at 100, and 17 countries under it (Eurostat, 2016).

Table 1. Gross domestic product in the EU

GDP index below average		GDP index above average	
Italy	96	Luxemburg	267
Malta	95	Ireland	177
Spain	92	Netherlands	128
Czech Republic	88	Austria	126
Slovenia	83	Denmark	125
Cyprus	81	Sweden	124
Portugal	77	Germany	123
Slovakia	77	Belgium	118
Lithuania	75	Finland	109
Estonia	74	United Kingdom	108
Poland	69	France	105
Greece	67		
Hungary	67		
Latvia	65		
Croatia	59		
Romania	59		
Bulgaria	48		

Source: Eurostat (2016).

These data give an approximate view of how and where a given country is situated in terms of wealth in the EU but are far from reporting the inequality experienced by the citizens. For that purpose, the unemployment rate and the Gini coefficient are more expressive indicators.

The unemployment rate is used as an indicator of inequality as it reveals the amount of people in a given country who are unable to make a living by working. However, the unemployment rate is heavily dependent on the quality of the data and cannot show underemployment or the fact that many people have to hold two jobs to make a living. In 2016, the average unemployment rate in the EU was 8.5 per cent (Eurostat, 2017a). Looking again at the countries above and below that average (Table 2), we find that 10 countries in the EU have an unemployment rate above 8.5 per cent and 18 countries are below this level.

Table 2. Unemployment rate in the EU – Above/below average

Unemployment rate above the EU average (percentage)		Unemployment rate below the EU average (percentage)	
Croatia	13.3	Austria	6.0
Cyprus	13.1	Belgium	7.8
Finland	8.8	Bulgaria	7.6
France	10.1	Czech Rep.	4.0
Greece	23.6	Denmark	6.2
Italy	11.7	Estonia	6.8
Latvia	9.6	Germany	4.1
Portugal	11.2	Hungary	5.1
Slovenia	9.6	Ireland	7.9
Spain	19.6	Lithuania	7.9
		Luxembourg	6.3
		Malta	4.7
		Netherlands	6.0
		Poland	6.2
		Romania	5.9
		Slovakia	8.0
		Sweden	6.9
		United Kingdom	4.8

Source: Eurostat (2017a).

The third economic indicator, the Gini coefficient, shows the inequality within a given country. The Gini coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation's residents and is the most commonly used measure of inequality. In addition, it points to the differences in the degree of inequality between countries. A higher coefficient signals greater inequality and vice versa¹: 100 would express maximal inequality and 1 maximal equality. In the EU, the average Gini coefficient is 31.0 (Eurostat, 2017b). Table 3 shows the Gini coefficient for the EU member states sorted into two groups: those above and those below the EU average.

1. The Gini coefficient is defined as the relationship of cumulative shares of the population, arranged according to the level of equivalized disposable income, to the cumulative share of the equivalized total disposable income received by them. It is intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation's residents, and is the most commonly used measure of inequality. A Gini coefficient of 100 expresses maximal inequality. The data are the latest available. The coefficient is relatively stable over the years.

Table 3. Gini coefficient in the EU – Above/below average

Gini coefficient above the EU average		Gini coefficient below the EU average	
Bulgaria	37.0	Austria	27.2
Cyprus	33.6	Belgium	26.2
Estonia	34.8	Croatia	30.4
Greece	34.2	Czech Republic	25.0
Italy	32.4	Denmark	27.4
Latvia	35.4	Finland	25.2
Lithuania	37.9	France	29.2
Portugal	34.0	Germany	30.1
Romania	37.4	Hungary	28.2
Spain	34.6	Ireland	29.8
United Kingdom	31.5	Luxembourg	28.5
		Malta	28.1
		Netherlands	26.7
		Poland	30.6
		Slovakia	23.7
		Slovenia	24.5
		Sweden	25.2

Source: Eurostat (2017b).

With respect to the GDP, Luxembourg, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Finland, the UK and France are above the European average (Table 1). This is an indication of the inequality between member states. To assess inequality within a given country, it is more useful to look at the unemployment rate and the Gini coefficient (Tables 2 and 3). Taken together, we can identify three groups within the EU (Table 4). Group I consists of countries with less severe indicators of inequality than the EU average. Group II is formed by countries placed below the EU average with regard to one of the inequality indicators. The member states in Group III show higher inequality than the EU average on two of the indicators. None of these groups is homogeneous with respect to old or new EU membership or the size of the markets.

Table 4. Economic inequalities within the EU

Country	Unemployment rate per cent (2017)	Gini coefficient (2016) ²	GDP per capita index (2016) ²
<i>Group I</i>			
Austria	6.0	27.2	126
Belgium	7.8	26.2	118
Czech Rep.	4.0	25.0	88
Denmark	6.2	27.4	125
Germany	4.1	30.1	123
Hungary	5.1	28.2	67
Ireland	7.9	29.8	177
Luxembourg	6.3	28.5	267
Malta	4.7	28.1	95
Netherlands	6.0	26.7	128
Slovakia	8.0	23.7	77
Sweden	6.9	25.2	124
<i>Group II</i>			
Bulgaria	7.6	37.0	48
Estonia	6.8	34.8	74
Finland	8.8	25.2	109
France	10.1	29.2	105
Lithuania	7.9	37.9	75
Poland	6.2	30.6	69
Romania	5.9	37.4	59
Slovenia	9.6	24.5	83
United Kingdom	4.8	32.4	108
<i>Group III</i>			
Croatia	13.3	30.4	59
Cyprus	13.1	33.6	81
Greece	23.6	34.2	67
Italy	11.7	32.4	96
Latvia	9.6	35.4	65
Portugal	11.2	34.0	77
Spain	19.6	34.6	92
EU	8.5	31.0	100

Source: Eurostat (2016, 2017a, 2017b).

2. Latest available data.

Attitudes towards the EU

Communication and media studies commonly feature an informed citizenship as the base of a working democracy and media that deliver content that aids the formation of opinions and intelligent decisions about what and how those in power should do or aspire to. This process is equivalent to the formation of policies on the European level.

Public opinions on the EU are surveyed on a regular basis by the Eurobarometer, a public survey commissioned by the European Commission, which takes place every spring and autumn. Although it has been criticized, because the commissioner of the survey is also the object of the questions (Höpner & Jurczyk, 2012), the Eurobarometer can serve as an indicator of opinions on the EU. Summarizing the general trends pointed out by the recent issues of the Eurobarometer, the results show a remarkable turn to a more positive trend in opinions on several subjects. This is true for the image of the European Union, the trust in the political institutions on the national and the European level and the optimism about the future of the EU. In the last available Eurobarometer (the spring 2017 edition), 40 per cent of the respondents indicated a positive image of the EU, while 21 per cent reported a negative image (European Commission, 2017).

Another survey commissioned by the European Parliament addresses the feeling of belonging to the EU. The feeling of belonging is an emotional dimension of opinions about the EU. Without a self-understanding of belonging, the idea of taking part in the discourse about European issues – either actively or passively – by consuming coverage on European issues, European citizenship has no solid ground and associated actions (i.e. taking part in European elections) become less probable. The European Parliament commissioned this study in 2017, two years before the upcoming European elections, with the objective “... to measure their level of belonging, and attachment to, the EU” (European Parliament, 2017: 5). Of the respondents, 57 per cent felt that their country’s membership of the EU “is a good thing” (European Parliament, 2017: 9). This is a significant contrast to the years between 2007 and 2011, when this appraisal of EU membership dropped from 58 to 47 per cent. In addition, 56 per cent feel attached to the EU. Again, this is in contrast to the previous developments, which showed a decline in feelings of attachment in the same years. The authors of the survey interpreted the results against the background of the growing uncertainties resulting from global geopolitical developments that give reason for concern. This might explain the increased tendency to favour a common European approach to address such developments. This interpretation seems to be plausible considering the fact that the feeling of belonging to the EU and the appraisal of EU membership have risen significantly and nearly reached the pre-crisis level of 2007. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America might have been a tipping point for these worries. The chapter does not aim to interpret these surveys further. Instead, it sets out to determine whether there is any relation between these opinions and the empirical evidence of inequality.

Relations between attitudes towards the EU and inequality measured using the Gini coefficient

We now consider how the Gini coefficient relates to the feeling of the respondents that their country's membership of the EU "is a good thing" (in the table: "appraisal of EU membership") and the feeling of belonging. In the introduction, we set up the hypothesis that inequality of wealth in a given country corresponds to the opinions about the EU among the country's population. We expect that, in countries where inequality is higher than the EU average, negative opinions about the EU are prevalent and vice versa. More precisely, this means that a high degree of inequality corresponds to a low appraisal of EU membership of the individual's own country and vice versa. Accordingly, a high degree of inequality corresponds to a low feeling of belonging to the EU and vice versa.

Relating the Gini coefficient to the appraisal of EU membership, we identify four groups of member states:

1. **The Gini coefficient is above average, meaning that inequality is higher than the EU average, and the appraisal of EU membership is below average. This applies to nine countries.**
2. **The Gini coefficient is identical to or below average, meaning that inequality is identical to or less than the EU average, and the appraisal of EU membership is above average. This applies to eight countries.**
3. Both the Gini coefficient and the appraisal of EU membership are equal to or above average. This applies to five countries, meaning that a high appraisal of EU membership is given although the inequality is high.
4. Both the Gini coefficient and the appraisal of EU membership are equal to or below average. This applies to six countries, indicating that a low appraisal of EU membership is given although the inequality is low.

The pattern in the member states belonging to groups 1 and 2 (printed in bold) verifies the hypothesis, while the results for groups 3 and 4 are opposed to the hypothesis.

In 17 (of 28) EU countries, we can highlight the coexistence of inequality and appraisal of EU membership in the sense that a high degree of inequality correlates with a low appraisal of EU membership and a low degree of inequality corresponds to a high appraisal of EU membership. In 11 (of 28) EU countries, the hypothesis is not supported.

Table 5. Attitudes towards the EU and income inequality

Country	Gini coefficient	Appraisal of EU membership (2017) ³	Gini/appraisal	Belonging to the EU (2017) ⁴	Gini/belonging
Austria	27.2	42	4	47	4
Belgium	26.2	64	2	59	2
Bulgaria	37.0	53	1	49	1
Croatia	30.4	36	1	41	1
Cyprus	33.6	45	1	39	1
Czech Rep.	25.0	33	4	35	4
Denmark	27.4	71	2	56	2
Estonia	34.8	67	3	54	1
Finland	25.2	57	2	47	4
France	29.2	53	4	55	4
Germany	30.1	79	3	70	3
Greece	34.2	34	1	33	1
Hungary	28.2	48	4	63	2
Ireland	29.8	81	2	66	2
Italy	32.4	35	1	48	1
Latvia	35.4	45	1	65	3
Lithuania	37.9	65	3	57	3
Luxembourg	28.5	84	2	79	2
Malta	28.1	64	2	62	2
Netherlands	26.7	79	2	51	4
Poland	30.6	71	3	67	3
Portugal	34.0	54	1	45	1
Romania	37.4	54	1	55	1
Slovakia	23.7	50	4	54	4
Slovenia	24.5	45	4	49	4
Spain	34.6	62	3	60	3
Sweden	25.2	65	2	54	4
United Kingdom	32.4	49	1	51	1
EU	30.1	57		56	

Sources: Eurostat, European Parliament, own calculation.

3. The percentage of respondents answering in a affirmative way on the question “Generally speaking, do you think that our country’s membership of the EU is a good thing?”

4. The percentage of respondents who feel attached to the EU answering the question “Please tell me how attached you feel to the European Union”.

If we look closer at the countries showing a low appraisal of EU membership, nearly all of group III (see Table 4), which combines two of the indicators showing greater inequality than the EU average, is represented (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Portugal), except Spain. On the other hand, among those countries with a high appraisal of EU membership, those countries of group I (see Table 4) that have lower inequality than the EU average are strongly represented (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden). This gives a hint that the appraisal of EU membership is linked to experiences of inequality.

Relating the Gini coefficient being above or below the EU average to the *feeling of belonging* to the EU being above or below the EU average, we can again identify four groups:

1. The Gini coefficient is above average, and the feeling of belonging to the EU is below average. This applies to nine countries.
2. The Gini coefficient is identical to or below average, and the feeling of belonging to the EU is above average. This applies to six countries.
3. Both the Gini coefficient and the feeling of belonging are equal to or above average. This applies to five countries, meaning that a strong feeling of belonging to the EU is given although inequality is high.
4. Both the Gini coefficient and the feeling of belonging are equal to or below average. This applies to eight countries, indicating that a weak feeling of belonging to the EU is given although inequality is low.

In 15 (of 28) EU countries, correspondence of inequality and the feeling of belonging to the EU is apparent in the sense that a high degree of inequality corresponds to a low feeling of belonging to the EU and a low degree of inequality corresponds to a strong feeling of belonging to the EU. In 13 (of 28) EU countries, the hypothesis is not supported.

Again, a closer look shows that a low feeling of belonging to the EU is mainly found in countries in group III (see Table 4), which combines two of the indicators showing higher inequality than the average (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal), except Latvia and Spain.

Overall, this rough juxtaposition of inequality, as expressed by the Gini coefficient, with the esteem of the EU, measured as the percentage of people who feel that belonging to the EU and their country's membership of the EU are a good thing, shows that there is a relation, although it is not very strong. In the next step, we will focus on the news supply in the national media markets in selected EU countries and see which developments can explain the correspondences found above.

News supply and European coverage

Studies show that the media affect attitudes about EU integration (Azrout et al., 2012; de Vreese & Boomgarden, 2006), the turnout in European elections (Banducci &

Semetko, 2003; Schuck et al., 2016) and general support for the EU (Norris, 2000). Based on those findings, we will look for patterns of news supply and trust in news media to find further tentative explanations for the above findings. Accordingly, we use the findings of the *Digital news report* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017), a comprehensive comparative study of news supply and trust in news media. The report is based on a survey of more than 70,000 people in 36 markets, with a focus on Europe. We use crucial findings of the report with respect to the above-mentioned research findings about how Europe is reported in the media.

Although the vast majority of news that people consume still comes from mainstream media, new online patterns of news consumption make it harder for European issues to get through to people. The limited range of issues covered is hence aggravated by the use of online provisions for news. Reuters's *Digital news report* finds stronger preferences for content that is selected by an algorithm (search, social and many aggregators) than content selected by an editor (direct, email and mobile notifications): "More than half of us (54%) prefer paths that use algorithms to select stories rather than editors or journalists (44%)" (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017: 16). As news about European issues already has difficulties making it into traditional media, it is probable that algorithms will discriminate against it even more, as such news will not receive the number of clicks to rank it highly. In addition, social media, news aggregators and the trend of watching short videos rather than longer ones push the reduction of political quotes or material further to short sound bites (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017: 19).

The fact that following the news in social media often means following those politicians whom a user agrees with and avoiding others (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017: 17) is another disadvantage for European coverage, as many topics cannot be pinned down to one or another politician (however, the trend towards personalization is relevant on the European level as well).

Answering the question of why we should analyse inequality and the media, Nieminen (this volume, chapter 3) seeks to establish a correlation between the increasing inequality and the growing popular distrust in the media. We try to find evidence for this correlation by juxtaposing the findings from the *Digital news report* and those from this chapter. The *Digital news report* addresses the declining trust in the media. Our country-related findings from the previous section show correspondence between a relatively high degree of economic inequality and a low appraisal of EU membership – although it is not very strong. This correspondence clearly applies to Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Portugal. Trust in the media is low in Greece, Croatia and Italy (below 40%) but not in Portugal.⁵ On the other hand, more than 40 per cent of respondents trust the media in Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and Denmark: countries approving of EU membership to a relatively great extent and displaying rather low indicators of inequality.

5. Cyprus and Latvia are not in the sample of the *Digital news report*.

In addition to these general observations, we use the findings of Reuters's *Digital news report* (2017) about the characteristics of the respective media markets. We concentrate on countries that show a high degree of economic inequality and low esteem for the EU as well as a low feeling of belonging, exemplified by Croatia, Greece, Italy and Portugal.

For Croatia, Peruško (2017) reports a media market characterized by a television sector in which threats to the editorial independence of the public service broadcaster (HRT) and financial stability are common. Ownership of the national press is highly concentrated, with falling print runs. In terms of online news, a digital-born news portal with strong (centre-left) opinions (Index.hr) is competing with the website of a tabloid newspaper (24sata), which is also the leader in the print market. The online presence of public service broadcasters (HRTi) is not very well used, possibly reflecting disillusion with changing editorial policies due to political influences. Peruško further points to an atmosphere of low trust, increasingly negative news and political populism, causing many (56%) Croatians to turn to social media as an alternative to traditional media. The survey responses also place Croatia in the bottom third of countries when it comes to trust in news overall (39%). Together, these attributes of the media market are not a favourable environment for fostering reliable and comprehensive reporting on EU and European issues.

The Greek media market is characterized by very low levels of trust in journalism, high use of social media for news and extreme fragmentation of the online news market. After the closure of the public broadcaster ERT in 2013, confusing government plans for allocating new TV licences and commercial pressure created quite an unstable media landscape. The *Digital news report* states "that news in Greece remains largely a way of gaining political and economic influence rather than being a viable commercial industry in its own right" (Kalogeropoulos, 2017). As 95 per cent of Greeks obtain their news online, news websites that regularly engage in conspiracy theories about health and political issues attract considerable attention. Facebook is the most widely used platform for news (62% use it), and 32 per cent of Greeks use Youtube for news content. These circumstances, together with the miserable economic situation in the country, which is mostly attributed to the EU, reliable news about the EU and in-depth coverage of European issues are more than improbable. In addition, Greeks have the lowest levels of trust in news in the Reuters survey (23%) and the greatest concerns about business and political influence over editorial content.

In Italy, Cornia (2017) holds the partisan nature of Italian journalism and a strong influence on news organizations responsible for the low levels of trust in the news (39%). The combination of public subsidies and private business sponsorship has made the media, print as well as TV, vulnerable to political and economic influence. The print press is considerably weak, while the TV market is highly concentrated. As the internet penetration is rather low compared with that in other European countries, television remains the main source of news for a majority, while the press rather addresses an elite audience. Public service broadcasting has not yet developed its online

news supply. These are market conditions that make it rather improbable that the EU and European topics attract the attention of broad media audiences.

In Portugal, reliance on television news is still relatively high, while an increasingly concentrated radio and print sector is struggling to remain relevant in a digital world (Pinto Martinho & Cardoso, 2017). The recession in 2011-2015 created an extremely precarious situation for journalists: over half (57%) of Portuguese journalists earn less than €1,000/month, and more than a third (34%) have no employment contract. The difficult working conditions of journalists will impede the reliable coverage of European issues, as these topics need expertise and a newsroom that supports the idea of reporting from the EU. Although the general media situation could give reason to doubt the independence of the media, we find a comparatively high level of trust in the media (58%) in Portugal. Pinto Martinho and Cardoso (2017) consider the low levels of political polarization to be responsible for this fact. The emergence and growth of social media pages acting as a watchdog against the mainstream media may also have contributed to this result.

This section studied the media markets of four countries, characterized by inequality in income higher than the EU average, a higher than average unemployment rate and low esteem of the EU and a low feeling of belonging to the EU among the population. These markets are characterized by deficits that are likely to cause weak coverage of European issues. This information detriment adds to the situation of inequality and feeds into the non-appraisal of the EU and the lack of a feeling of belonging that we found in our country examples. We cannot argue clearly that the perception of inequality is causal for the esteem of the EU, but we see obvious correspondences of high inequality and low acceptance of the EU. Critical attitudes towards the EU can be considered as an effect of both an information detriment about European issues and economic inequality.

Conclusions

This chapter provides evidence of the inequalities in the EU and establishes correspondence to the non-appraisal of the EU. Of course, it is a short circuit to relate attitudes about the EU in a monocausal and one-way explanation back to the real economic situation of citizens. It is similarly an oversimplification to make media coverage alone responsible for attitudes. Instead, we can assume that the complex concurrence of perceived inequality and media coverage will have an impact on attitudes.

The analyses of the data show a rather clear-cut result for countries that are in a worse position than the average of the EU member states, because they combine higher inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, with a higher than average unemployment rate. In Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal, the population has a lower appraisal of EU membership and a lower feeling of belonging to the EU (in Latvia this applies only to the appraisal of the EU). A quick look at media markets and news

consumption in these countries made it obvious that the EU, as a topic that requires solid reporting to be accessible, does not stand a real chance. The respondents of the Eurobarometer in those countries give further support to the argument that the lacking appraisal of decisions and institutions in the EU is an expression of a detriment of information that adds to the situation of inequality.

Apart from this, the results reveal that the relation of the economic situation and the attitudes towards the EU does not follow a simple pattern but is quite diverse: the relation ranges from Spain, where a comparatively disastrous economic situation did not destroy the sympathy for the EU, to countries that are economically better off than the average of the EU countries but value the EU less. Between them are countries that are quite ambivalent in their attitude towards Europe. For each of these cases, further research and a deeper analysis of the factors that have an impact on the opinions about the EU are needed. If it would be possible to find more detailed correlations between attitudes, inequalities and media coverage, the complex concurrence of perceived inequality, media coverage and attitudes about the EU could be clarified further.

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Chapter 7

Inequality in the media and the “Maslow pyramid” of journalistic needs in Central and Eastern Europe

Péter Bajomi-Lázár

This chapter investigates how self-regulation could counter inequality of access to the media as a channel for information and expression in the context of the former state-socialist countries. It describes the Anglo-American self-regulatory model that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe attempted to adopt after the political transformations in 1989-1991, observes the failure of the implementation of this model and – through a case study of Hungary – describes some of the dysfunctions of the news media in the region. Further, it suggests that ethical journalism is the highest level of the “Maslow pyramid” of journalistic needs, preceded by acceptable work conditions, job security, a functional market and media freedom, and hence that ethical journalism cannot be pursued as long as the other conditions are not met. More particularly, it argues that the reasons for the failure of the self-regulatory mechanisms in these new democracies to be efficient concern the distortion of the media markets and the deficit of media freedom, among other factors.

Media regulation is aimed at ensuring media freedom and pluralism by providing equal access for all to the media which function as a forum for both expression and information. It is based on positive intervention such as the creation of public service media, the licensing of community radio stations and the establishment of press subsidy systems, as well as on negative intervention, such as ownership regulation preventing mergers that undermine the pluralism of voices (see Bayer’s chapter in this volume). Academics and policy makers have widely discussed the role of *regulation by the state* (e.g. Alonso & de Moragas Spà, 2008; Just & Puppis, 2012; McQuail & Siune, 1998). However, they have paid much less attention in recent decades to the role that *self-regulation by the journalist community* may play in ensuring equal access to the media: the topic of this chapter.¹

The role of the journalist community in improving the equality of access to the media is almost self-evident. Professional journalists have *communicative power* in

1. Recent decades have witnessed an increasing trend of *co-regulation*, that is, when the form is set by the state but the content is chiefly defined by the journalist community and, in some cases, representatives of the audiences (cf. Frost, 2000). This chapter, however, will not discuss co-regulatory efforts, which have occurred fairly sporadically in most of Central/Eastern Europe.

the sense that they have the means and the expertise to access the media and to give voice to their views. That audiences have traditionally lacked these means constitutes *structural inequality* between journalists and audiences. Self-regulatory mechanisms – including codes of ethics and practice, ethics commissions, press ombudspersons, journalism training and prizes promoting quality journalism – are based on the acknowledgment of this inequality and the ensuing *social responsibility* of the press. For example, the Hutchins Commission in the United States argued in 1947 that the press should provide “a representative picture of the constituent groups in society” (quoted in Siebert et al., 1956/1963: 91), and the Royal Commission on the Press in the United Kingdom suggested in 1949 that “the press as a whole [should give] an opportunity for all points of view to be effectively presented” (quoted in Curran & Seaton, 1998: 288).

This is an ethically based obligation. As William Ernest Hocking, a member of the Hutchins Commission, explained: “If one claims free expression as a right, he claims it for others as well as himself, and he binds himself to respect their exercise of it; if he yields his claim, he weakens the claim of others” (Hocking, 1947, quoted in Siebert et al., 1956/1963: 96). Equality of access to the media and freedom of expression are closely related concepts, as communication rights pertain to all citizens, regardless of their social status, expertise and means of accessing media. In a similar vein, freedom of expression and freedom of information are closely related, too; for one to be able to form and to voice opinions, one needs to be reasonably well informed (see McQuail’s chapter in this volume).

Historically, the social responsibility theory of the press emerged as a response to the libertarian theory: the latter criticized the former for restricting access to the media to the wealthy and the powerful and called for equality of access for all (Siebert et al., 1956/1963). In terms of journalism ethics, the social responsibility approach is more of a normative theory than an actual practice in that only selected outlets – such as some public service broadcasters and leading broadsheets – followed it, while other media either continued to promote particular values and interests or remained focused on entertainment.

The social responsibility theory of the press and the ensuing self-regulatory mechanisms aimed at ensuring fair and neutral reporting first emerged in the US and the UK in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Chalaby, 1996). It should be remembered, though, that journalism in the United States has historically oscillated between partisanship and the search for objectivity, the former being the rule in times of crisis and war and the latter in periods of prosperity and peace (Bajomi-Lázár, 2003). Newspapers in the United Kingdom have always been more partisan than broadcasters, the latter, bound by law, seeking to cover news and current affairs more neutrally (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Importantly, self-regulation is not a magic weapon. In and by itself, it cannot ensure complete equality of access to the media. Only if coupled with an adequate regulatory and business environment can it be expected to enhance quality journalism. Media freedom, including the autonomy of journalists, is another pre-condition for self-

regulation to be operational: only journalists who are their own masters can follow their own rules (Frost, 2000). In recent years, the efficiency of self-regulatory efforts has also been undermined by the rise of civic journalism, lacking consensual norms and evincing some controversial phenomena, such as the massive production of fake news.

During and after the fall of state-socialist regimes and the ensuing demise of direct political control over the press in the late 1980s and early 1990s, journalism communities in Central and Eastern Europe experienced an unprecedented amount of media freedom; the old political elites were no longer and the new ones were not yet powerful enough to seek control over them. This freshly earned autonomy enabled journalists to adopt self-regulatory mechanisms, an option that had been blocked for many decades. Because of the global dominance of satellite television channels such as CNN International and BBC World in the news market, as well as newly opened access to the services of neutrally reporting Western European and North American wireless agencies, Western media seemed to constitute *one single model* from the perspective of Central and Eastern European media professionals. Differences within the Western world, which only came to be highlighted by Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini's 2004 book *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*, were largely unknown at the time among journalists in the former state-socialist countries. Media models other than the one that Hallin and Mancini called the “North-Atlantic” or “liberal” system – such as the polarized pluralist model in Southern Europe where advocacy journalism prevails – had little impact, if any, on journalism communities in the former state-socialist countries, despite the obvious similarities between the third-wave democracies that had emerged in the mid-1970s and the early 1990s (cf. Bajomi-Lázár, 2017a).

In short, the self-regulatory efforts in Central and Eastern Europe were largely based on the Anglo-American (or North Atlantic or liberal) model and were often assisted by BBC experts; for example, the Visegrad Notes, adopted in 2000, were drafted with the involvement of journalists from the British public service broadcaster. Such media ethics is rooted in the social responsibility theory of the press in that it suggests that the media have a *social mandate*, that is, they serve society at large rather than particular political and business interests (cf. Kunczik, 2001). They are meant to harmonize diverging communication interests such as the public's right to know and privacy rights (Frost, 2000). It is notable, though, that there are some minor differences in the self-regulatory methods adopted in the former state-socialist countries; for example, Lithuania – because of its cultural and geographic proximity to Scandinavia – adopted the Swedish model of press ombudspersons, which remained largely unknown in most other Central/Eastern European countries.

The major standards commonly promoted by the Anglo-American codes of ethics include truthfulness, accuracy and impartiality, non-discrimination, the protection of human rights and the respect for privacy, the presumption of innocence, the protection of sources and conflict of interest rules. Such codes describe consensual rules that distinguish good journalism from bad journalism (Schulz, 2001) and thus enhance

the legitimacy of the journalistic profession with the public. These rules also protect journalists when exposed to political pressures in that they can argue that they have followed legitimate rules, such as rules on the protection of sources (Frost, 2000). Briefly, media ethics is meant to improve the fairness of the media and to secure the informed political choices of citizens by levelling the inequality of access to the channels of mass communication and by ensuring the pluralism of information. Media ethics is a means of morally driven self-restraint in that it warns journalists not to abuse their communicative power and designates the legitimate limits of free speech for them.

Importantly, however, it is not only moral considerations that drive the journalist community when adopting self-regulatory mechanisms. In a competitive media market, media ethics is also enhanced by business-mindedness. By improving the transparency and legitimacy of the rules of the profession, self-regulation is meant to restore public trust – the major capital of journalists – in the media in the event that it has been undermined by excessive tabloidization or political pressures (Frost, 2000). Historically, journalistic self-regulation emerged in the United States as an effort by broadsheets to distinguish themselves from the yellow press (Iggers, 1988). In addition, as Svennik Høyer (1998: 58) observes, the rise of the objectivity doctrine meant the decline of the party press in the US, making neutrality a new business model and a “strategy for larger circulation and larger audiences”. Ethical journalism is hence also expected (albeit not proven) to improve newspapers’ position in the audience and advertising markets and thus to generate profit.

This chapter describes the failure of self-regulatory efforts and some of the dysfunctions of the news media in the former state-socialist countries. It suggests that ethical journalism is the highest level of the “Maslow pyramid” of journalistic needs, preceded by acceptable work conditions, job security, a functional market and media freedom. Hence, ethical journalism cannot be pursued as long as the other conditions are not met. More particularly, it argues that the reasons for the failure of the self-regulatory mechanisms in these new democracies to be efficient concern the distortion of the media markets and the deficit of media freedom, among other issues.²

Self-regulatory efforts in Central and Eastern Europe

Despite repeated efforts, such as the adoption of codes of ethics and the establishment of ethics commissions, politically neutral journalism has never taken deep roots in Central and Eastern Europe; it has been the exception rather than the rule (Lauk, 2009). In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, its failure has been “reflected in a lack of impartiality” and “a relatively high degree of mobility between the professions of journalist and politician” (Školokay, 2001: 129, 116). In Hungary, “the *one-party* model of the press has not disappeared completely but has been transformed into a

2. Special thanks are due to Auksė Balčytienė, Attila Bátorfy, Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and Josef Trappel for their valuable comments on the first drafts of this chapter.

multi-party model that is still far away from the *nonpartisan* model of the press” (Lázár, 1992; emphases in the original). In Poland, the Media Charter of Ethics prescribes the standards of objectivity, but most journalists have continued to “represent partisan politician viewpoints” (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012: 41-43). In Moldova and Romania, there has been a “discrepancy between professional ideology and real journalistic practice” (Milewski et al., 2014: 108). In the three Baltic states, the media system has “not yet been fully separated from the existing political system” (Balčytienė, 2012: 62).

At the same time, differences prevail across the former state-socialist countries; for example, neutrality-seeking journalism has taken deeper roots in Poland than in Romania and Moldova (Milewski et al., 2014). It follows that the ethics of social responsibility journalism are respected or ignored to different degrees across the region, and the countries evince different patterns of breaches of ethical journalism. As a summary study by Ellen Hume (2011) shows, recurring breaches of journalism ethics in Central and Eastern Europe include fake blackmailing photos (the Czech Republic), intense tabloidization (Romania), national and ethnic discrimination (Latvia), over-politicization (Poland and Romania), the bribing of advertising agencies for advertisements (Romania) and desk-top journalism excessively relying on official sources and other news outlets (Romania). Some breaches of journalism ethics are even more dramatic. Henrik Örnebring (2012: 506) highlights that news media in Central and Eastern Europe widely engage in advertorial and kompromat practices:

Advertorials are a form of media content oriented toward promotion and positive content, whereas kompromat (a Russian word but widely understood in the entire CEE region) refers to a form of media content oriented toward smearing and negativity. Both forms of content are [...] either paid for or ordered by political or business interests, but [...] appear like regular news content.

The breaches above, maybe needless to say, also occur in some of the more established democracies of Western Europe and Northern America (cf. McNair, 1998; Schudson, 2003). A major difference, however, is that, once uncovered, breaches of journalism ethics in the Western world are usually followed by moral, political and, sometimes, legal sanctions. An illustrative case in point is the aftermath of the phone-hacking scandal in the United Kingdom in the 2000s, including an investigation by the Press Complaints Commission and the closure of News International’s *News of the World*. In Central and Eastern Europe, however, mistakes are rarely admitted, and breaches of journalism ethics usually do not trigger consequences.

Media ethics ignored: The case of Hungary

The case of Hungary is particularly illustrative of the breaches of media ethics in Central and Eastern Europe – not because Hungary is so typical of the region but rather because it evinces a collection of some of the “worst practices” of journalism.

While the Code of Ethics issued by the Hungarian Journalists Association (2011), the largest journalism organization, stresses standards such as integrity, independence, reliability and fairness, as well as the protection of human rights, non-discrimination, the respect for personal dignity and the protection of information sources, a paper by Tamás Terestyéni, published in 1999, suggests that standards of ethical journalism were repeatedly violated in the first decade after the political transformation. Breaches included outright lying, selective reporting, mutual accusations lacking rational arguments, poor transparency of public information, intrusions of privacy, the failure to admit the mistakes made, the rejection of responsibility, the disguising of problems and a lack of self-reflection and of self-criticism, which resulted in an overall “weakness of the public sphere”. To this, Ildikó Kaposi and Éva Vajda (2001) add the predominance of official sources and the ensuing failure of journalists to contextualize information, the frequent breaches of conflict of interest rules and the abundance of quantity journalism as opposed to quality journalism, brought about by the widespread practice of freelance journalism paid by the number of pages submitted.

In the 2000s, further deficiencies included pure speculation (as opposed to factual reporting), the insinuation of politicians without proof (of corruption), fake re-contextualization (for example, the selective quoting of sentences from public speeches to attribute to them a new meaning that was at odds with the originally intended one), hoaxes (with reference to non-existent or non-verifiable sources), strange timing (such as the disclosure of old corruption scandals at election times) and disproportionately loud criticism (such as a major outcry after a minor transgression of the political norms) (Bajomi-Lázár, 2010).

The electoral victory of the Fidesz/Christian Democrats party alliance in 2010 marked the beginning of a new era, starting with the immediate adoption of new media regulation and the establishment of a new media authority consisting of Fidesz delegates only. In subsequent years, the Hungarian media landscape was fundamentally transformed as a new media policy aimed at the *particularistic redistribution* of media resources (Bajomi-Lázár, 2017b) was gradually implemented, resulting in the massive rise of pro-government outlets, including public service broadcasters and the national wireless agency, and the marginalization of critical voices, especially in rural areas (Urbán et al., 2017). According to an analysis published by the independent investigative news site Átlátszó, in 2017, 59 per cent of all media outlets held a pro-government position, 20 per cent were neutral and 21 per cent were oppositional to and/or critical of the government. These ratios varied across sectors. Of all the nationwide daily titles, 65 per cent supported the government, a ratio reaching 90.5 per cent in the market of weeklies and 100 per cent in the market of regional dailies. Oppositional/critical voices had preserved a good position in two sectors only: that of online news sites (50%) and that of evening television news bulletins (45%) (Bátorfy, 2017a). These figures worsened after the repeated electoral victory of the incumbent parties in 2018, immediately followed by the closure of three critical outlets: the broadsheet *Magyar Nemzet*, the talk station Chain Bridge Radio and the English-language

news site BudapestBeacon. A little later, in June 2018, the weekly *Heti Válasz* also ceased print publication.

The media transformation was mainly conducted via the excessive redistribution of state sources to pro-government outlets: while in 2008 state advertising amounted to only 3 per cent of the total advertising revenues, it reached 26 per cent in 2017 (as opposed to an EU average of 7%) (Bátorfy, 2017b). State advertising in various outlets allows the government to exert pressure on editorial content. For example, the ratio of government-sponsored ads in the last left-wing quality daily standing, *Népszava*, reached 56 per cent of the newspaper's total revenues in 2017 (Dercsényi, 2017).

As a result of the transformation of the media landscape, a series of questionable new media practices emerged in the 2010s, further undermining the equality of access to the media and creating a hegemony of pro-government voices. These included:

1. Extensive pro-government propaganda campaigns in print, on radio and television as well as on online platforms. The campaigns are eased by government cronies buying media outlets with the help of loans provided by state-owned banks, the funding of partisan media from public advertising resources and the capture of public service broadcasters (on propaganda techniques in “public service” media, see Bajomi-Lázár & Tóth, 2013). State-funded political campaigns have also delivered propaganda messages on outdoor posters and via staged “national consultations”, that is, print surveys mailed to all households and including framed answer options. Such campaigns were aimed at the discrimination of entire social groups based on their nationality and ethnicity, particularly targeting immigrants from the Near East and North Africa (Zalán, 2017). Another publicly funded campaign targeted Hungarian-born American billionaire and philanthropist George Soros, whom the Hungarian government accused of supporting immigration and thus threatening Hungarian and European Christian culture. In the year 2017, the government spent 12 billion forints (40 million euros) on this campaign, with most of the funding being channelled to pro-government outlets (Átlátszó, 2018).

2. Decreasing transparency of public interest information, including the massive classification of data. This is particularly true regarding the construction of a new nuclear power plant near the city of Paks in central Hungary and the obligation imposed on media outlets to pay for such data when contacting authorities. Journalists of critical outlets were repeatedly denied access to political events, including the opening ceremony of the parliament in May 2018. Government politicians have declined interview requests from critical media outlets on a systematic basis.

3. Character-killing campaigns launched on pro-government outlets against critical intellectuals and opposition politicians, often based on unverified information. Kompromat articles were typically unsigned, anonymity being a means of rejecting responsibility for the contents. A common feature of these moralizing campaigns was irrelevance: they frequently reported on personal issues that were not linked to the public activities of the people affected. Recent character-killing campaigns include

those against the journalists Boróka Parászka and Olga Kálmán, the stand-up artist András Nagy-Bandó and the politician Péter Juhász (as well as the humble author of this chapter).

4. The rise of “collaborative journalism”, that is, the uncritical interviewing of the senior representatives of the governing parties in pro-government media, including public service radio, the daily broadsheet *Magyar Idők* and regional newspapers.

5. Highly selective reporting of facts, especially regarding how immigrants have allegedly invaded Western Europe.

6. The production of fake news on an industrial scale (444, 2017; Corruption Research Center Budapest, 2018; International Press Institute, 2017). Hoaxes and disinformation campaigns have, of course, always existed; one might recall that the first law banning the dissemination of fake news was passed in the United Kingdom as early as 1275 (Briggs & Burke, 2010). The novelty is that this time fake information is released via multiple sources simultaneously.

7. The publication of a “black list” of citizens who are critical of the government. Given the historical tradition of blacklisting people with a different political view, this might exert an intimidating effect on those listed (and also on those who could not read their names on the list but were known critics of the government). For example, on 12 April 2018, the weekly *Figyelő* published the names of hundreds of intellectuals described as the “mercenaries” of George Soros (Figyelő, 2018). On 26 April, the daily *Magyar Idők* listed “left-liberal” writers and other artists (Szakács, 2018). Whether the people listed had made a decision to act as public intellectuals and to voice their views overtly or not, their blacklisting is a reason for concern – not only from an ethical but also from a legal perspective.

This, of course, does not mean that all newsrooms breach the standards of ethical journalism on a regular basis. It is, however, important to note that many of the breeches of journalism ethics described above appear to be intentional. As Gábor G. Fodor, editor-in-chief of the pro-government news site 888.hu, proudly said in an interview in April 2018, “We do politics. We are fighters. There is nothing to be ashamed about” (quoted in Czopf, 2018). This is a special kind of advocacy journalism, though, as the speaker associates himself with the governing parties, not just some political cause. His position might remind the observer of the state-socialist times when journalists were considered to be “the party’s soldiers”, an expression commonly attributed to Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin himself.

The fact that this is not the Southern European kind of advocacy journalism but rather *downright propaganda* is illustrated by the personal, organizational and financial links between the governing party and the media owners. For example, the proprietor of Radio 1 and of TV2 is Andrew G. Vajna, the government commissioner in charge of the film industry, and most regional dailies are owned by Lőrinc Mészáros, the former

Fidesz mayor of the home village of Viktor Orbán. By contrast, the opposition parties are not formally linked to critical outlets.

The practices above are obviously at odds with journalism standards, such as truthfulness, accuracy and impartiality, the protection of human rights, non-discrimination, the respect for privacy, the presumption of innocence and conflict of interest rules. This is no surprise, as a key paradox of media ethics is that the media outlets that are the most in need of self-regulation are the most reluctant to exert self-restraint, while audiences tend to judge the overall performance of the media on the basis of the most poorly performing outlets. According to the *Digital news report 2017* issued by the Reuters Institute, among 36 countries on five continents, Hungary took the thirtieth position in terms of general trust in the media; only 31 per cent of people trust the media (the list is led by Finland, with an outstanding 61%). In Hungary, only 11 per cent said that the media were free from political pressures, which granted Hungary the second-last position among the sampled countries. Further, the difference between general trust in the media (31%) and trust in one's favourite outlet (54%) was the highest in Hungary. In other words, the media are the most polarized – or the most partisan – in Hungary among those 36 countries. Put differently, Hungary evinces the most detached journalism practices from the idealized standards of Anglo-Saxon journalism in the sample.

The practices described above are not meant to ensure equality of access to the media but to undermine it. Particularly worrying is the intentional distribution of fake news, aimed at the manipulation, not the information, of citizens. Unethical journalism has contributed to increased inequality of access to the media as a channel for information and expression and created an “uneven playing field” (Bozóki, 2017) for competing political actors.

As already noted, the Fidesz/Christian Democrats party alliance won the legislative elections in the spring of 2018 for the third time in a row. The role that the media practices above have played in their massive electoral victory can only be a matter of speculation. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that the election results would have been different, had the media been free and critical, as, under the hegemony of pro-government voices, citizens were unable to make informed choices and were unaware of the suspected corruption cases involving government members and their cronies.

Partisanship persisting in Central/Eastern Europe

Why have the Anglo-American standards of journalism ethics failed to take roots in those Central and Eastern European countries in which journalist communities have made repeated efforts to implement them? The reasons, of course, may vary across countries, and different factors may be at play to varying degrees. Below is a tentative list of the factors that might explain the failure of the implementation of the standards of neutral journalism in many of the former state-socialist countries.

The Anglo-American standards of journalism are based on a common understanding of the public good; they are both rooted in and meant to reinforce this understanding. The standards for neutral reporting have evolved in societies that have had, comparatively speaking, moderately pluralist political cultures and in which the political landscapes have been dominated by centrist parties, such as the US and the UK (Chalaby, 1996; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Even though polarization has been on the rise in these countries, as shown by the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum, political and social actors in these societies, including journalists, seek consensus and try to avoid conflict as a main rule. By contrast, the societies of Central and Eastern Europe have, in historical terms, experienced frequent political changes (Hallin & Mancini, 2013), the only thing unchanged being *change*, and are societies in *permanent transition*. Furthermore, as Auksė Balčytienė, Epp Lauk and Michal Głowacki observe (2014: 10-11),

... a changing society is characterized by its lack of a solid social or ideological base [...] finding consensus on important public issues becomes increasingly problematic. [These] social trends significantly contribute to increasing political divergence and fragmentation and create a heterogeneous and socially polarized picture.

Most of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe evince polarized pluralist or fragmented pluralist political cultures, as a number of important societal questions remain unresolved. From a historical perspective, these countries have experienced a long series of political transformations whereby competing political elites grabbed power, often through violent means. Hungary, for example, underwent ten different political regimes in the course of the twentieth century, the ideological profiles of which ranged from the far right to the far left (Szabó, 2000). The political landscapes of these countries are typically dominated by a number of political parties that are divided along major ideological cleavages. Consequently, conflict is more frequent than consensus. It follows that notions of the public good diverge and journalists are divided along ideological and political cleavages. They primarily associate themselves with a particular cause, ideology or party rather than with society at large. As competing concepts of the public interest prevail, journalism ethics based on a common understanding of the public good can hardly be implemented, if at all.

Another reason for the failed implementation of the Anglo-Saxon standards of journalism may concern the relatively low levels of media freedom. According to Freedom House historical data, media freedom has been declining since the European Union accessions in 2004 and 2007 in the overwhelming majority of the Central/Eastern European countries. Worst of all of the former state-socialist countries where the media have to date been described as only “partly free” are Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and some countries in the Western Balkans (Freedom House, 2017). The decline of media freedom was particularly spectacular in Hungary, which – according to the press freedom rankings compiled by Reporters Without Borders (2018) – ranked twenty-third among the globe’s countries in 2010 and seventy-first in 2017. In Central and Eastern Europe, many of the legacy media are either subject to direct political control,

as is the case for most public service broadcasters and national wireless agencies, or subdued by indirect political control via government cronies or “oligarchs” (Štětka, 2012). As already noted, media freedom, including the autonomy of the journalism community, is a pre-condition for self-regulatory mechanisms to be operational and enforceable. As long as this freedom is lacking, journalists are bound to follow the rules prescribed by their masters.

Last but not least, the distortions of the media market may also be responsible for the inefficiency of self-regulatory mechanisms. As noted, media ethics is also driven by business-mindedness: in a competitive market, quality journalism, providing the public with fairly presented truthful and plural information, is widely believed to be profitable. However, in a distorted media market – such as that of Hungary, where the government has become the single most important player, distributing advertising revenues on a favouritist basis – it is not journalistic performance but political loyalty that matters the most. In fact, quality journalism in markets like this is often sanctioned by punitive government measures, such as the withdrawal of broadcasting licenses and the denial of state advertising revenues. At the same time, unethical journalism practices, such as character killing, are rewarded. As a result, in markets distorted by politically motivated and excessive state intervention, unethical journalism has become a viable business model. Without a financial drive, self-regulatory mechanisms will lack efficiency and only few outlets will attempt to follow them.

Conclusions

No one particular element of a complex media system can be transplanted into another with a wholly different political, cultural and economic background. This is one of the likely reasons for the failure of the adoption of the Anglo-American self-regulatory mechanisms – designed to level inequalities of access to the media as a forum for information and expression – in many of the former state-socialist countries where the political and business settings differ from those in the North Atlantic countries. While the mechanisms enhancing ethical journalism may be efficient in some of the moderately pluralist old democracies that exhibit free media as well as free and competitive media markets (such as the US and the UK), they are unlikely to succeed in polarized pluralist young democracies where media freedom has been undermined and the media market has been distorted by particularistic media policies. Where politics is conflict-based and regulation by the state is excessive and intentionally poorly designed or implemented, the necessary conditions for efficient self-regulation will be lacking. In such contexts, the lack of efficient self-regulatory mechanisms means that the media will perpetuate and sustain inequalities, rather than countering them.

Many journalists and newsrooms in Central and Eastern Europe encounter more common problems than media ethics and have simply struggled for survival to date. In the “Maslow pyramid” of journalistic needs, ethical behaviour is the highest level,

preceded by job security, acceptable work conditions, a functioning market and media freedom. Under political pressures and excessive state intervention, these basic conditions are hardly met for critical-minded journalists. Ethical journalism is part of one's self-assertion, which few journalists can presently afford (see Figure 1). In other words, journalism ethics cannot be pursued properly until all of the other conditions are satisfied.

Figure 1. The Maslow pyramid of journalism



Does this imply that, in view of the current political and economic circumstances, the idea of ethical journalism should be abandoned altogether in many of the former state-socialist countries? This may not be the case. While the implementation of the standards of journalism ethics is certainly lacking, the knowledge and dissemination of such standards provides both journalists and the public with a normative framework that helps them to assess and evaluate the actual practices of journalism.

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Chapter 8

The illusion of pluralism

Regulatory aspects of equality in the new media

Judit Bayer

This chapter examines some normative regulatory aspects of furthering equality in the media. From the perspective of legal regulation, equality is a normative concept that is dependent on many social and economic factors. Legal regulation alone may achieve only limited results in this area. This chapter focuses on various aspects of pluralism and diversity as factors that have the potential to advance equality in the media. To approximate this ideal, the efforts of all actors in society are needed, including the users themselves,¹ journalists, state regulators and international policy makers. A new set of actors emerged in the era of Web 2.0 media: platform providers as facilitators and gatekeepers of spontaneous citizen communication. Equality in publishing and accessing information online raises issues regarding the rights and responsibilities of gatekeepers. The roles and responsibilities of these actors have not been crystallized yet.

Freedom of expression is one of the prerequisites of democracy. Deliberative democracies cannot operate without open, public discussion of social matters. To pursue valuable public discussions, access to public information is also needed, along with the possibilities and capacities to exercise these rights. Participation in discussions on common-interest matters must be wide enough and citizens need to be well informed to achieve a meaningful level of discussion.

The media traditionally did not provide the possibility for everyone to publish their ideas, and this produced regulatory theories regarding the responsibility of the media to be representative of all sides in society, which became part of the concept of media pluralism. The traditional media structure functioned as an automatic filtering mechanism: only views that withstood the scrutiny of editors (and other participants in the process, including media owners) could be published. The content was mostly created by media professionals, such as journalists and cameramen, or at least coordinated by studio anchors. In many ways, the content became more relaxed, spontaneous and perhaps entertaining, and in retrospect it is clear that the mediated content rep-

1. In this paper, the audience of various types of media, including viewers, listeners, consumers, readers and so on, will be called "users" generally.

resented the elite's opinions and positions. Even if it targeted non-elite social groups, it was mediated and filtered through the lens of a financial and/or intellectual and, in some cases, political elite.

In contrast, social media allow everyone – without filters and mediation – to express their voice in writing, pictures and videos. No educational “census” or media literacy are required: in fact, even a small child can create a video and upload it on Facebook with three taps on a smartphone. This creates vast potential for equality with respect to participating in public discussion, and cyber-optimists indeed dreamt of a global participatory democracy without central governance (Barlow, 1996).

The reality is sobering: there are many voices, but there is not one big audience (McQuail, this volume, chapter 2). The scope of attention is limited, and non-transparent algorithms and filter bubbles influence the consumption of media content (Sunstein, 2009). Under these conditions, the established (mainstream) media's role in selecting the voices that it deems worthy of representation is even more important. Because of the so-called network effect (Barabási, 2002), also called the “Hollywood effect” by Karol Jakubowicz (2015), the greater prevalence particular content has, the more attention it will acquire, growing like a snowball. The voices that are already popular will be amplified, while others may vanish. What is more, entering the “attention” market becomes difficult despite the low costs of publishing (Barabási, 2002; Jakubowicz, 2015).

The new structure of public discourse has yet to be studied. A new cause for concern is the emergence of organized political manipulation disseminated online by way of disinformation and populism (Engesser et al., 2017; Martens et al., 2018; Russell, 2016). Such manipulation exacerbates the existing inequalities in media literacy as well as cultural and economic capital and targets the most vulnerable online audiences to cause social tensions in democracies (Lessenski, 2018). Planting the seeds of hostility, democratic societies are thereby threatened with political turmoil and decline in the protection of human rights (Agarwal et al., 2017).

The relationship between media pluralism and equality

A strong correlation can be established between the discourse on media pluralism and that on inequalities. When examining the constituents of media pluralism, several elements can be distinguished: diversity of media outlets, media genres and representation as well as access to publication by minorities and diverse social groups, political independence and concentration of media ownership.

In one approach, media pluralism can be divided into three layers: *macro*, *meso* and *micro*. The macro layer is the level of ownership, the meso layer refers to the regulatory and other public organizations on the media market and the micro layer means the plurality of content (Czepek et al., 2009: 46). In the new media environment, research has shown that a new aspect of pluralism has emerged and become relevant: exposure

to diverse content (Helberger, 2011; Napoli, 2011). Exposure is dependent partly on the selective choices of the user and partly on the algorithm that selectively recommends content to the audience (see below for more detail) (Möller et al., 2018). The issue of exposure diversity has been widely researched (Helberger, 2011; Hitchens, 2011; Napoli, 2011). This aspect of diversity assesses the diversity of the content actually accessed by the user from the plurality of choices. Therefore, the pluralism of access, or exposure diversity, could be introduced as the fourth layer of pluralism, in addition to the existing three elements. From this perspective, the third and fourth layers show the extent to which users actually access diverse content, whereas the macro and meso layers are tools to achieve this end (McQuail, 2000; Van Cuilenburg, 2000).

Describing the macro and meso layers as “tools” does not mean that they are not equally important preconditions for realizing a diverse media offer and equal access to content. However, equality in the media – equality of access to content and of the chances to be heard – can theoretically exist without plurality at the ownership and regulatory levels but not without plurality at the content and access levels. The former has been observed in rare cases, for example when a responsible content policy of the dominant media outlets – whether commercial or public – ensures diversity of content, without the plurality of the market itself (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012). Still, as Edwin Baker held, relinquishing the claim for market plurality would be a luxury: “source diversity – effectively ownership dispersal – is directly, substantively central”. Baker adds that, even if there is no evidence that the output of content is always more divergent with diversity of ownership, having a concentrated media ownership structure is a risk that “no democracy should afford. Commonly, commentators (wrongly) believe that the ultimate concern must be content and viewpoint diversity – with other differences being merely instrumental to this goal” (Baker, 2006: 15). While all layers of pluralism increase the likelihood of promoting equality in the field of media, they may still be insufficient in fully ensuring equality.

The media studies literature distinguishes between external and internal media pluralism. External pluralism describes the nature of the entire media system within a certain market (or society). Internal pluralism may refer to the balanced content of a certain medium: namely that it represents a broad variety of viewpoints, is impartial and does not bend to one specific opinion or position (Czepek et al., 2009: 47). However, in a converging media environment, these distinctions are becoming blurred as the units of examination become unclear. For example, a broadcaster – even one that is public in nature – may publish several thematic channels (Jakubowicz, 2015: 43).

The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute has developed and uses a set of indicators to measure the level of media pluralism in European states. In the first year, the indicators were cultural diversity, geographical diversity and diversity of media types and genres. In subsequent years, however, these were replaced by a single indicator of social inclusiveness. Social inclusiveness is composed of the following measures: access to media for different social and cultural groups and local communities, availability of media platforms for

community media, access to media for physically challenged people, centralization of the media system, universal coverage of the public service media and the internet, and media literacy. All of these factors contribute to the realization of equality.

Through qualitative questionnaires, the research measured how the values mentioned have been realized in various countries. The best score was achieved in the realm of “access to media for the physically challenged people” and the lowest (highest risk) in the realm of “media literacy” (Centre for Media Pluralism and Freedom, 2018). The study delivers quantified data based on the questionnaire and thus makes the level of pluralism across European countries visible and comparable.

The role of regulation in fighting inequality in the media

Media regulation cannot tackle all the elements of pluralism equally. While ownership concentration and regulatory bodies have been traditional objects of regulation, content and access especially are more difficult to influence with state instruments. It could be argued that, if the “hard” part of pluralism – the technical conditions for a diverse offer – is ensured, the “soft” part – content and access – has a much better chance of ensuring equality of access to content, including online content. Equality of internet access includes the capacity to upload and download content without discrimination.

Pluralism regulation (macro level)

National media regulations at various levels can ensure diversity of ownership, sources and content. The following statements are based on a study carried out in 2016 on six member states of the European Union (EU).² Most of the states studied have specific rules limiting ownership concentration in the media, while others have only general competition law regulations (Bulgaria). A tendency of liberalization can be observed in some states (France and Hungary) in the form of policy aimed at helping the industry to flourish under declining financial circumstances. Although cross-media concentration is regulated in most countries, diagonal or conglomerate ownership concentration is generally unregulated (Meier & Trappel, 1998: 41, 42). In the context of this study, diagonal or conglomerate ownership concentration is understood as the intertwining of media enterprises with other industrial or business sectors. These sectors are most typically related to construction but also include banking, energy, tobacco, postal distribution and defence. As all of these economic activities are connected to strategic state policies or the state budget, such ownership concentration puts the political independence of the partner media enterprises into question (Bárd & Bayer, 2016: 56, 91).

2. Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Italy, France and Greece. For the selection criteria, please see the original study: Bárd and Bayer (2016).

One tool to prevent media concentration is merger control, which is exercised by either the media regulatory authority or the competition authority or by the two authorities in a combined procedure (Hungary) (Bárd & Bayer, 2016). Beyond the ownership of media enterprises, the concentration of media distributors can also be regulated, for example with cable and internet service provider (ISP) companies. This field is relatively concentrated in most states, with no more than three or four big companies dominating a market, often with a local monopoly limiting the choices of consumers (Bárd & Bayer, 2016).

The internet content market is more diverse and typically has a “long tail” (Anderson, 2010) in the sense that innumerable small content providers add colour to the online scene. Traditional big media companies tend to have strong positions in the online content market as well, but overall the competition is stronger.

While several European states have rules against ownership concentration in the media, this does not prevent inequalities in media representation or in access to the media. In addition, even though the media market is becoming increasingly international, the regulation of anti-concentration remains national. This is almost ironic in the context of the European common market, where competition law falls exclusively under the competence of the European Union. How is it possible that no common pluralism rules have yet been passed? Although the issue has repeatedly been put on the agenda (Bárd & Bayer, 2016: 24-31), none of the initiatives have resulted in legislative action – even though the Commission had concrete plans to issue a Communication as part of a three-step strategy (European Commission, 2007). The possible reasons for this are manifold.

First, any regulatory change restricting media concentration will obviously disadvantage the media incumbents and their political allies. Hence, change depends largely on political interests and not only on rational arguments (Collins & Cave, 2013: 312). However, defining the interests of the stakeholders is not a straightforward exercise: the political, economic and public interests in the field of media freedom and pluralism within the EU make for a complicated mix.

Second, basic questions are disputed not only at the political level but also in scholarship. No generally valid benchmark can be established to define the desired level of concentration. Concentration can be measured in relation to several aspects: vertical and horizontal concentration, cross-media concentration and diagonal or conglomerate concentration. There is no scientific consensus about the ideal situation, which also differs according to the population, market size, GDP and cultural traditions (Iosifidis, 2010).

Ideally, a common European regulation should be based on a common standard for assessing concentration. However, the chances that states will agree on which model to use are slim: the audience share model, the market share model, the license holder share model, the capital share model or the revenue share model? Further issues need to be settled as well, such as the scope of anti-concentration measures, the criteria used to define the thresholds and the enforcement procedures and mechanisms limiting

the number of licenses or imposing a ceiling on the total number of shares that can be controlled by a single person or company, limiting the market share, and so on (Nikoltchev, 2004; Valcke, 2009). States are also divided over the issue of restricting media ownership of political parties and organizations.³

Media pluralism lies at the intersection of economics, law and social science. In the field of regulation, it touches on competition law, state aid and market regulation but also on cultural policy and, crucially, fundamental rights and democracy. Even the incentives for regulation are contradictory: the European Commission wants the EU market to be globally competitive with the transatlantic media industry; this would require strong private actors, which would not support diversity. Some member state governments, however, prefer to maintain smaller companies out of fear of competitors in political influence. This creates a highly complicated network of conflicting interests, often with contradictory expectations (Bayer, 2018).

As if this was not enough, digitalization causes dramatic transformation in the media market, a process that makes the industry a moving target; the convergence of media platforms, the interrelations of international markets and the hardship in defining substitutable products complicate the definition of the legally relevant market.

Regulatory bodies and public service media (meso level)

Traditionally, the role of regulatory bodies was to distribute frequencies and ensure that the content of electronic media was lawful and diverse. In the age of abundant digital cable channels, the power of regulatory bodies became more limited: they distribute frequencies on the radio market and regulate the distribution of television channels. In this role, regulatory bodies should take the issue of equality into consideration, and most states do impose must-carry obligations on their distribution networks. The European Union's (2002) Universal service directive requires that such obligations may only serve legitimate public policy considerations or general interest objectives where the interest of access by disabled users is explicitly mentioned.⁴ State regulation of public service media can be listed at the meso-level layer as an entity with a defining presence in the media market.

According to the original public service ethos, public service media is the branch that serves the ideals of equality best: it must represent societal minorities, be universally accessible and ensure a high moral and professional quality. However, in some member states of the European Union, public service media still carry the characteristics of public service media under authoritarian regimes, operating under

3. Some countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece and Hungary) exclude political actors from acquiring broadcast licenses or impose obligations of political independence on broadcast organizations, while others (Cyprus, Finland, France, Italy, Sweden) do not impose such restrictions at all. In Malta, the three political parties all own their own radio stations and the two largest parties even own their own television station. See Valcke (2009: 26).

4. See Article 31 and preamble 43 of Directive 2002/22/EC.

government pressure and lowering their professional standards to serve particular political interests (e.g. Bulgaria and Hungary).

From the 1990s, the European Union started to regard media services as economic services, which led to the recognition of public service broadcasting as being dependent on state aid. State aid is, however, generally prohibited in the EU by the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (Articles 107-109 TFEU) (consolidated version, 2012)⁵ and allowed only under strictly defined exceptions. The European Commission issued a Communication in 2001 (updated in 2009) to interpret the EU legal approach to lawful forms of state aid (European Commission, 2009).

The resulting principles and requirements in relation to providing state aid in the European Union are respected in several states, including France and Italy, following encounters with the European Commission in this area (European Commission, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2010, 2013).⁶ Other countries, for example Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland, do not appear to take notice of the guidelines in the European Commission's Communication on state aid to public service broadcasting (Bárd & Bayer, 2016). The specific issue of efficacy and transparency of financial management is widely regarded as problematic in many states, for instance in Romania but also in France (although the overall compliance with the Communication is better). Financial mismanagement, corruption or clientelism is often suspected. After the 2011 media reform in Hungary, public service broadcasting was reorganized and provided with adequate financing (approximately €268 million in 2016). Nonetheless, there is evidence of breaches of journalistic standards for the sake of disseminating untrue information for political purposes (Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely, 2015; Nolan & Walker, 2018). The Hungarian public service media (MTVA) are directly supervised by the head of the regulatory authority, directly appointed by the prime minister.⁷

Public service television and channels that enjoy must-carry status are the primary news source for users in low-income, low-education areas who cannot afford subscription-based television channels. As a result, equality in regard to access to information is greatly influenced by the quality of these channels, as social groups with low financial and cultural capital do not have access to subscription-based television services or printed press, or even internet access in some cases. Therefore, social equality will be negatively affected if public service television and other must-carry channels are of low quality and politically biased.⁸

5. "1. Save as otherwise provided in the Treaties, any aid granted by a Member State or through State resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods shall, in so far as it affects trade between Member States, be incompatible with the internal market" (Article 107(1) TFEU).

6. For more, see http://ec.europa.eu/competition/sectors/media/decisions_psb.pdf.

7. Article 136 Sections (6), (10), (11), (14) and (16) Mttv.

8. Public service radio is not discussed here. It should not be underestimated from the perspective of equality – however, it is not subject to EU regulation and is therefore omitted from this chapter.

Regulatory aspects of the content level of diversity (micro level)

The internet brought an expansion of publication possibilities that increased the chance for all would-be voices to be heard (McQuail, this volume, chapter 2). All potential content was brought into the home of the citizen – a diversity incomparable to that of television. Beyond that, it became possible to publish with very low entry costs in the form of intermediary platforms, such as comments, posts, blogs, pictures and videos. In addition, the culture of communication is getting increasingly visual, enabling the posting of content even by those who cannot read and the overcoming of language barriers. Each and every citizen became capable of participating in the public discussion, which appeared to contribute to the realization of the dream of full democracy. The practically general access to the public sphere for all citizens even raises the issue of whether this access could even be regarded as a human right (Bayer, 2018).

The drawbacks are that many content threads are not relevant to the public discourse and that the scarcity of attention creates a new limit to participation. In addition, intolerance, hatred, populism and fake news have gained embarrassing popularity in this public sphere. As a result, democratic dialogues are hampered and democratic values and electoral processes become endangered (Russell, 2016; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Although internet technology could enable the greatest realization of participatory democracy, we are witnessing online public communication leading to a decline in the functioning of democracy. A lack of scarcity and easy access create enough room for all content, even minority or local content, including independent, experimental media. This feature has recently been misused to spread disinformation and hateful messages for the sake of political manipulation. According to a research study, the most vulnerable part of the population to such manipulation is the same social group that has lower education, lower income and lower media literacy (Lessenski, 2018). The global inequalities described by McQuail are thus maintained, partly fuelled by the network effect (Barabási, 2002) that is generated by the great content aggregators and facilitators, such as social media platform providers and search engines that channel content directly to the users.

In the first wave of internet regulation, it became obvious that restricting unlawful and harmful content with the existing legal instruments is becoming increasingly difficult. The immense amount of content, the lack of borders and distance and the flexibility of communication – including the low investment required for republication and anonymity – made it close to impossible for state regulation to control the publication of, and access to, illegal content.

To date, some measures have consequently been invoked to facilitate the regulation of illegal content. China and other autocratic countries have installed a filter wall on all the internet traffic entering the country and constantly monitor all of it. The German approach opts for co-regulation by setting up a system that is consequently enforced within the country according to the principles of law and not disturbed by the fact that foreign information that is considered illegal in Germany is available anyway.

The recent legal approach by the Estonian and Hungarian national courts and by the European Court of Human Rights (*Delfi v. Estonia*, ECtHR, 2015; *MTE and Index v. Hungary*, ECtHR, 2016) as well as the proposed amendment to the AVMS Directive regulating online platform providers (European Commission, 2016, Art. 28) would outsource the task of regulation to platform providers that transmit third-party content. This has the potential to restrict the equality of citizens by restricting the possibility to publish ideas and creative content through the social media and intermediaries, for example in the comment sections. The restrictions imposed by the mentioned court decisions have led to the abolition of comment sections below articles in journalism (see more on the liability of platform providers below).

Regulatory aspects of access and exposure (micro level)

Even though the internet can offer a vast diversity of content, users are unable to enjoy the whole spectrum, because their time and attention capacity are limited. This scarcity restricts the perception of content; in fact, attention scarcity diminishes access to pluralistic content to an even greater extent than concentrated ownership (Helberger et al., 2015). In an age of overabundance of media content, media reception achieved greater equality in theory (McQuail, this volume, chapter 2). Access to online content is practically not limited by economic factors in the first world. However, the selection of media content largely depends on decisions made by the individual, limiting the diversity of content actually accessed. The selection is often not the result of rational deliberation but reflects the socioeconomic and educational status of the user and thus perpetuates existing inequalities (Prior, 2007). Users tend to favour content that confirms their prior beliefs and that is recommended by their acquaintances. In addition, content selection algorithms try to copy earlier selections made by users and offer content similar to what the users appear to have liked before. This keeps users in content bubbles (Napoli, 2011; Valcke, 2011). As shown, exposure diversity has a human factor (individual choices) but also a technological factor (algorithms and network speed).

Algorithms are neutral technology: their purpose is designed by their programmer. Currently, most algorithms are programmed to serve commercial purposes. They are praised for serving users' interests, but, by remembering and amplifying users' selection decisions, they isolate users from diverse sources of information. Users become confined to their "echo chambers", fostering the development of extremism. Although some research results are controversial, there is evidence of group polarization or "cyberbalkanization" (Barberá, 2015; Dutton et al., 2017; Iványi, 2014; O'Hara & Stevens, 2015). While minority representation has better chances on the internet, such content has slim chances of being accessed by majority users. Rather than embracing the whole diversity of culture, numberless subcultures may develop and exist in parallel.

Because of the advances in visual communication, literacy is less of a requirement to access new media. However, a new barrier creates inequality within society:

knowledge of foreign languages. The internet brought the global media into the room of the citizen, but, for the illiterate or those who cannot speak or read English (or Chinese, the second-biggest language of the internet), the options remain severely limited (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2018; Young, n.d.). Whether this inequality can be changed with translating software remains to be seen.⁹

Citizen publishing through new gatekeepers

Since about 2003, Web technology has reached a second phase that some have dubbed Web 2.0. Although the name has since faded, it characterizes a new stage in network development. The publishing of thoughts, ideas, facts and creative works through online platforms has become everyday practice, particularly for the young generation. Besides creating content, citizens produce technological tools, widgets and apps that communicate ideas and knowledge (DeNardis & Hackl, 2015: 768).

Equality of the media includes equal access to publishing through the media. Content aggregators and facilitators of content, however, have the power to amplify or suppress information that is published by various users. As a result, access to the audience is not equal but currently governed by these new gatekeepers, for example the social media platform providers and search engines that use algorithms to further their commercial interests. Current regulatory attempts try to hold these actors responsible for the content transmitted – thereby placing even more power in their hands.¹⁰ Under the German Network Enforcement Act and the proposed AVMSD Platform, providers would have the legal responsibility to prevent illegal and harmful content from being transmitted.

This chapter argues that the fundamental right to free speech would best be served if platform providers were obliged to remain neutral intermediaries and to make their content selection algorithms transparent – at least at the level of principles. The present regulatory developments provide the power (and responsibility) of discretion to these private, commercial entities, which are not supposed to have the discretion to make decisions regarding citizens' content. Without disputing the necessity of regulating manifestly illegal speech, citizens would – under the currently proposed scheme – lack constitutional protection or redress against the removal of lawful content. It may appear practical for governments to “outsource” the burden and cost of regulation to private actors. Platform providers may also prefer this active participation rather than potentially being subjected to legal regulation (Brown, 2010: 7). Nevertheless, sparing the constitutional burden of restricting speech would almost certainly lead to over censorship without constitutional guarantees for citizens. From the perspective of

9. It should be noted that the internet has accelerated the globalization of cultures and communication and stimulated the language acquisition of internet users.

10. See *Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Rechtsdurchsetzung in sozialen Netzwerken* [Act on Network Enforcement] (2017) and Articles 28(a) and (b) of the European Commission (2016) Directive proposal. France passed a law against fake news in 2018, as did Italy.

fundamental rights, gatekeepers of public information and innovation would possess the power to restrict public discussion without being accountable to citizens. Currently, there are several interfaces through which gatekeepers exert direct power over online rights, such as privacy, freedom of expression and access to information (DeNardis & Hackl, 2015: 769). These private intermediaries have become vital components of the digital public sphere and practically exercise control of civil liberties. Their design and internal rules have direct implications for communication rights, such as access to information and freedom of expression. Their situation could be compared to that of shopping malls: “they offer free public access and a place to engage in expressive activities, they operate as a virtual public forum” (Peters, 2017: 1000). In the American free speech jurisprudence, it has been declared that shopping malls are similar to public spaces, even though they are privately owned; the same applies to company towns or their respective areas that are open to the public. As a result, the exercise of free speech enjoys First Amendment protection in these locations (*Amalgamated Food Employees Union Local 590 v. Logan Valley Plaza*, 1968; *Marsh v. Alabama*, 1946), although the case law is not entirely homogeneous in this sense (see more in Peters, 2017). Another analogy from American law could be the status of common carriers; social media companies are comparable to common carriers, because they serve as gatekeepers of citizen communication. The Web allows anyone to publish their content, but practically this is performed through platform providers (1), and no content can be found without search engines (2). This makes them comparable to common carriers; hence, they should be obliged to act neutrally and indiscriminately, similarly to ISPs, which provide access to internet traffic. Nevertheless, recent turmoil in the field of net neutrality in American legislation shows that this debate has not been settled yet (Finley, 2018). In addition, the practice of the European Court of Human Rights is contradictory (*Appleby & others v. the United Kingdom*, ECtHR, 2003).

Conclusion

The changing media environment has improved the potential for two important aspects of media equality: publishing and accessing of media content. In recent years, negative side effects of this development have arisen. Despite the endless content, the new scarcity of attention hampers the fulfilment of the media’s democratic function. Although the variety of content has grown, so have the possibilities of selection. The engendered echo chambers reinforce and create new social clusters through media consumption, bolstering social inequality.

Legal regulation and policy in the field of new media are, so to say, in experimental phases: no stable principles of regulation have materialized, and the role of social media providers in particular has yet to be formed. Legislators have an eye on industrial competitiveness, on stimulating innovation and, to some extent, on respect for fundamental rights. Equality is not apparent amongst the objectives of regulatory plans.

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Chapter 9

The missing link

Blind spots in Europe's local and regional news provision

Leen d'Haenens, Willem Joris & Quint Kik

This chapter examines the recent and ongoing developments in the field of regional and local news provision in Europe, investigating the circumstances under which the latter contributes to creating and/or reducing inequalities. We ask ourselves: Does online offer a true alternative to offline when it comes to local and regional news? What about the “hyperlocals”? Do these new online initiatives, driven by entrepreneurs who are not necessarily journalists, offer an answer to legacy media's retreat from the centre of local communities? This chapter concentrates on editorial choices, business models and innovation (im)possibilities revolving around regional and local journalism. In particular, our lens focuses on the Dutch experience with local and regional news provision as our case in point. The Dutch experience and other examples in Europe show us that, so far, new media initiatives have not filled the gaps left behind by traditional media, thereby increasing local and regional news inequality. Consequently, there is a danger that technology organizations (often not European) will colonize the local territory.

This book deals with several types and dimensions of media inequality. In this chapter, we look at what happens when media inequalities occur at the local and regional levels and the possible negative effects that these may have on audiences. We provide an empirical analysis measuring inequality in regional and local news media and offer ways to promote equality in news provision so that people can act to their full capacity (see also Therborn, 2013) by taking part in public deliberation and practising democratic control. This is the goal. In reality, local and regional journalism is withering away, while government communication aimed at cities and townships is turning more professional, thanks to ever more competent communication collaborators. Furthermore, local politicians developing information channels of their own through social media are becoming less dependent on the local media. Although digital technology is available as a fourth power to innovate locally, it seems to be increasingly difficult to assure polyvocality and control over local and regional governors at this scale.

d'Haenens, Leen; Joris, Willem & Kik, Quint (2019). The missing link: Blind spots in Europe's local and regional news provision in Josef Trappel (ed.) *Digital media inequalities: Policies against divides, distrust and discrimination*, pp. 141-157. Göteborg: Nordicom.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the recent and ongoing developments in the field of regional and local news provision in Europe, investigating the circumstances under which the latter contributes to creating and/or reducing inequalities. Furthermore, the chapter will study the role of digital technologies in this process. The terms “regional” and “local” are open to multiple interpretations, covering print, broadcast and digital media. Our focus is on news media operating at the sub-national level. When it comes to giving voice to communities at the regional or local level across Europe, strong differences regarding the availability and implementation of legislation for regional broadcast media exist across the EU member states. National sovereignty is full in Europe in this sector (Cappello, 2016), as media pluralism has always been excluded from the audiovisual media services directive. Moreover, licensing agreements for broadcasting services and media ownership have never been subjected to harmonization efforts (Cappello, 2016).

Regional media have been affected seriously by the financial crisis. This has had dramatic results for regional pluralism and participatory democracy, because regional journalism is expected to facilitate the “public discussion of, and engagement with, regional politics and issues” (McGonagle & Van Eijk, 2016: 11). In 2009, a Dutch government commission (the so-called Brinkman Commission), looking into the future of journalism, came to alarming conclusions regarding the state of regional and local journalism in the Netherlands. While national dailies suffered from a clear-cut decline in circulation and loss of advertisement revenues, regional dailies seemed to have received an even harder blow. Due to ongoing business restructuring, increasing numbers of journalists were being made redundant. Consequently, not helped by a hostile economic context, what was once a tight network of local “watchdogs” was slowly but surely being replaced by an accumulating number of “blind spots” and “missing links” in municipalities no longer covered by a professional journalistic presence. Differences in inequality regarding local media provision can be predicted by the type of region (e.g., Nygren et al., 2017). Urban areas with dense populations tend to be serviced by traditional local media as well as digital platforms. In contrast, sparsely populated areas often lack local media provision, traditional as well as digital local media. In other words, nowadays, some regions receive little or no attention from journalists. This lack of proximity between regional journalistic media and their target communities is also political in nature (McGonagle & Van Eijk, 2016), leading to far less plurality in local media or no plurality at all. Although we acknowledge that regional journalism is not only about politics, as much content concerns human interest, court cases and miscellaneous stories, we refer to McQuail (in this book), who establishes a close relationship between equality and objectivity, the foremost norm of journalism. Hence, we ask ourselves: Can these blind spots gradually be replaced by other local media infrastructures, which take on the role of a local watchdog? What context proves to be a more advantageous breeding ground for an emerging alternative news infrastructure so that greater equality in the news provision at the local and regional level can be promoted?

As some of the most important decisions affecting our communities are made elsewhere, the intrinsic motivation to follow local politics is reduced. Nevertheless, there remains a clear need for a “glocal” take on issues (i.e. focusing on the local impact of global trends), which comes with a challenge: namely, the ability to cover local affairs in ways that resonate with the audience (Nielsen, 2015). News makers should also take into account the varying search strategies and news consumption patterns of audiences. These are mainly threefold: direct to the brand or title, via search engines and on social media. Such strategies operate alongside one another but differ widely across age groups and across countries. Well-to-do regional and local journalistic platforms extended to social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) help to foster public discussion. However, growing audience fragmentation is taking place, with bigger collectivities falling apart in smaller communities and with a platform for every “niche” and “filter bubbles” possibly becoming bigger and more resilient. Moreover, traditional institutions are losing trust, while individual experts and peers are gaining authority and the wisdom of the crowd wins over traditional experts. In such a context, regional news media could reclaim and enhance citizen involvement by adopting citizen-centred practices with news consumers turning into news producers (e.g., Hermans et al., 2014; Rosen, 2008).

Against this background of societal trends, the unfavourable development of consumption patterns and the question of economic viability, we ask ourselves how these general trends translate into news production at the regional and local levels. More concretely, what is the current state of regional and local news provision? Which topics tend to be covered? Does online offer a true alternative to offline when it comes to regional and local news? What about the *hyperlocals*: do these new online initiatives, driven by entrepreneurs who are not necessarily journalists, offer an answer to legacy media’s retreat from the centre of local communities? This chapter’s focus is on editorial choices, business models and innovation (im)possibilities revolving around regional and local journalism. In particular, it concentrates on the Dutch experience, with local and regional news provision as a case in point. This chapter offers a quick review of several studies conducted by the Netherlands Journalism Fund aimed at mapping both the quantity and the quality of locally or regionally oriented online and offline news media in the Netherlands. A distinction was made between hyperlocals and news aggregators, examining the nature and the diversity of the news content provided as well as the size of the community for which it caters.

Local editorial anchoring: Out of touch?

Local media suggest local editorial anchoring and a news media product that is essentially meaningful and relevant to citizens of a specific geographic region within a nation (Engan, 2015). First and foremost, local journalism has been fed by local newspapers. The most important role of local media is to hold power to account and

to keep people informed about public affairs. This role is associated with the notion of journalism as a *watchdog* (e.g., Hanitzsch, 2011). Local media represent their area and help people to imagine themselves as part of a community, connected through their shared local news medium and bound together by more than geographic proximity (Nielsen, 2015). Local journalists may present themselves as gatekeepers of the news, but leading policy makers and some activist groups may feel that they have considerable influence on the news media agenda. Independent local news media function as a democratic keystone in the community. However, this independence does not automatically ensure that journalists are in touch with citizens' changing needs. Qualitative research conducted with local television audiences in the Netherlands shows that people expect local media to perform as follows (Costera Meijer, 2010: 327):

1. supply reliable, fast, unbiased background information on community matters;
2. foster social integration;
3. offer inspiration and good examples;
4. ensure representation of different groups and neighbourhoods;
5. raise local intra-community understanding between groups;
6. share a civic memory of local affairs;
7. promote a sense of belonging to the community.

Consequently, when a community loses its local news media, it also loses the institutional memory to raise the profile of the community, to inform citizens and to campaign on issues of local relevance (Currah, 2009). Therefore, the emerging news gap is a serious threat to democracy. Empirical studies have shown that local news media play a vital role in public life and political debate, enhancing political knowledge and participation (e.g., van Kerkhoven, 2016). Furthermore, with the decline of local newspapers, the sense of community may disappear. The quality of local journalism has already been studied extensively. On the one hand, local journalism is seen as vital for the creation and maintenance of a democratic political and public arena and a general sense of social cohesion and public connection, as it provides information about local public affairs (e.g., Aldridge, 2007; Couldry et al., 2007). Moreover, local journalism holds local elites accountable, provides a forum for discussion and ties communities together (Nielsen, 2015). As social action arises at the community level, local media have a responsibility to motivate citizens to be involved in their environment and seem to be more proficient than national media in doing so (e.g., McLeod et al., 1996). Currah (2009) states that local media might survive through digitization because of these functions in the community. The main question, however, remains: How do local news media succeed in connecting with their audiences?

Local journalism has been criticized on a regular basis for not achieving its own aspirations, as journalists often uncritically follow the local elites ("the watchdog that

didn't bark"). Consequently, as controversy is frequently avoided, local journalism is perceived as being artificial and too deferential to local elites (Nielsen, 2015). Furthermore, local media coverage has been subject to much criticism for not being local enough and for prioritizing soft news over more substantial coverage of local problems (Franklin, 2006). As journalists aim for a large audience, they have to adapt their media offerings to the public's taste. As a result, the social role of journalism is undermined and overshadowed by the priorities of the market (e.g., Oosterbaan & Wansink, 2008). The reality of local journalism undoubtedly lies in the combination of the two perspectives (Nielsen, 2015). Although local journalism plays its role sub-optimally, the role that it plays is important.

Innovation in the region

Local media companies are suffering from the present economic rationalization, such as business restructuring. All of them have been occupied with cutting costs and layoffs. Two innovation approaches are put to the test as driving forces of innovation: 1) convergence and 2) alternative local news business models.

Van Kranenburg (2005) recognizes convergence as follows: 1) selling the same product to a larger public and 2) selling more products to the current audience. A good example of this scale approach, which allows for risk spreading and more flexibility, is that of the Norwegian media conglomerate Schibsted; its newspapers *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Faedrelandsvennen* have joined editorial forces to take advantage of the economies of scale that editorial and commercial collaboration can offer (van Kerkhoven, 2016). Schibsted is also a typical example of a company selling more products to the same people, as it has managed to centralize the advertising sales for its different news brands.

Furthermore, local journalism is changing as part of a more widespread structural revolution of the media environment, driven mainly by the upswing of digital media, which have affected both journalists' work and news content. If screen devices (i.e. televisions, PCs, smartphones, etc.) prove to be the only sustainable media in the near future, important transformations for local news media may be required, as these channels are general as well as global. They correspondingly do not favour journalism in the printed press, and they convey content and standards other than the specifically local (Engan, 2015).

Convergence may affect local media companies in multiple ways. This ongoing transformation comprises changes not only in the newsroom organization and structure and the journalistic routines but also in the audience relations (Deuze, 2007; Hermans et al., 2014). New company structures might offer synergy. The profit derived from control over diverse media outings could lead to more efficiency and in so doing to cutting costs. To keep the tradition of investigative journalism alive, some local media have constructions to allow their journalists to investigate deeply the actions and

events within their community. For example, a Dutch local newspaper, *Dagblad van het Noorden*, has an editorial office of three journalists. Each of them combines four weeks of research with two weeks of reporting. Thus, investigative journalism remains possible. Another example of convergence can be found in the United Kingdom. In February 2017, the public service broadcaster, the BBC, announced a partnership with the entire local news sector: from main press publishers to news agencies, commercial broadcasters, hyperlocals and local television. The service will be funded by the BBC, but the network of reporters will be employed by other news organizations. These journalists will report on local public affairs, not only filling their own medium but also adding this coverage to a central system, which will be accessible for all local partners. A similar British initiative is the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, in which a network of journalists and tech experts across the UK works together on investigative journalism in local communities. The aim is to combine and support the skills and expertise of British journalists and technologists to cover news stories that are too time consuming or technologically complex to be covered alone.

Furthermore, there is the prospect of expansion into new markets and the broadening of the media scope to attract a new audience (Currah, 2009). Finally, not only the way in which the public is informed and entertained but also the method for communicating and sharing content has changed (Nielsen, 2015). New communication forms, such as social media, facilitate audience production of information and provide journalists with more opportunities for interaction with relevant others. Thus, these new channels enable relatively easy input for stories from a variety of sources and perspectives. Two-way communication means an improved understanding of the audience's needs (Jenkins, 2006), and, as the consumers are changing, advertisers are using cross-media platforms too (Thurman & Herbert, 2008). To enable convergence, it is necessary to create partnerships with other media organizations to provide and exchange news content as well as cross-media production (Deuze, 2004). In the regional media centres in the Netherlands, in which several public and private regional and local media platforms collaborate in an innovative way on news production, the freed editorial capacity paves the way for research, current affairs and opinion pieces.

Although various local and regional media have already experimented with the opportunities of converging to cross-media publishing (i.e. the same content on different platforms), convergence may also be assumed to compromise the quality of journalism. It might destroy craftsmanship, because former news text writers may be forced to learn new skills, such as technological skills. This may undermine basic journalistic skills and standards (e.g., Bromley, 1997). Thanks to a remarkable number of digital newsgathering and publishing tools that are now available (e.g., Twitter, Wordpress or Tumblr), many of these local news media are able to gather, analyse and publish local news.

Due to crowdfunding, *Mediacités* in France was launched as a counter-reaction to the lack of regional investigative journalism in the national press outside Paris. This online platform investigates political, economic, social and cultural powers in the

region, with a focus on four cities: Lille, Lyon, Nantes and Toulouse. Furthermore, in the larger French cities, despite some isolated initiatives, the media landscape is almost always dominated by a single newspaper, with little focus on investigative journalism (Mediacités, 2018). *Correctiv* (correctiv.org) in Germany is an independent investigative journalism platform collaborating with several regional newspapers that also regularly focuses on local issues: in its *reporters' factory*, it trains citizens to collect local information and become active in local journalism.

Hyperlocals

A promising innovation approach next to convergence is an *alternative local news business model*. Freedman and colleagues (2010) proposed the development of local news hubs, which could act as news production centres with shared resources as well as training centres through collaboration with universities and research institutions. Such local news hubs could reinvent local newsrooms with a business model that supports local news in the twenty-first century. Online news models will play a leading role in local news markets, as they are more flexible and cheaper regarding production and distribution (Nielsen, 2015).

The web has supported a new generation of community-oriented local news outlets. High hopes are set on new initiatives, the so-called *hyperlocals* (online local initiatives that produce and distribute news gathered in and focused on a designated geographic area) and the locally oriented *pure players* (i.e. born-digital local news media including for-profit, not-for-profit and citizen journalism initiatives) (e.g. Smyrnaiois et al., 2015; van Kerkhoven & Bakker, 2015). Metzgar and colleagues (2011: 785) demonstrated that “hyperlocal-ness does not exist as a solitary point on a single measure”. They suggested that “it is a composite of measures on a variety of continua”, focusing on geographical elements, community orientation, original news reporting, origins on the web, filling perceived gaps and civic engagement. Hyperlocals range enormously in reach, type, purpose, aims and regularity of reporting (Moore, 2015). A hyperlocal site is not just a blog (Lowrey, 2012); hyperlocal news operations need to be regular and frequent and to follow a few basic journalistic rules and professional standards (e.g., Anderson, 2013). However, van Kerkhoven and Bakker (2015) reported that hyperlocals are not particularly concerned about journalistic ethical codes and standards. Journalistic practices are rather instrumental instead of conditional. Consequently, hyperlocals risk losing credibility and public trust.

Inside journalistic start-ups, daily operations include interaction and permanent adjustment between journalists and a particular segment of the public that can hold the role of expert, informant and analyst as well as reader (Smyrnaiois et al., 2015). This segment of the public, far more active than the average citizen, is predominantly highly educated, possesses strong cultural capital and is intensely interested in politics (Smyrnaiois et al., 2015). This type of journalism has a higher degree of accountability

towards the readers than the mainstream media, engages in permanent discussions with the audience and is more flexible concerning time constraints. Most hyperlocals are committed to producing news that fulfils the watchdog function of holding elites to account. A UK survey showed that many hyperlocals are performing similar democratic functions as local newspapers (Williams et al., 2015): 81 per cent of the hyperlocals covered local council meetings; 79 per cent reported about local government planning issues; and 75 per cent covered local businesses. Nonetheless, Smyrnaiois and his colleagues (2015) identified two important shortcomings. Firstly, the majority of the population is not yet familiar with hyperlocals, limiting their influence in comparison with traditional local media. Secondly, purely local players mostly fail to break even, certainly if their business model is based on traditional advertising or subscriptions. Successful purely local players instead draw on non-journalistic activities, such as PR film production and advertorials, endangering their independence from local business and policy makers (Smyrnaiois et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the quality of non-professional contributions is a point of discussion. Although journalists consider themselves as representing the public interest, they are not engaged directly with the public (Firmstone & Coleman, 2015). For example, mainstream news media are rather sceptical about the quality of non-professional contributions and only allow audience comments for publication and content in specific sections (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). Moreover, the comments from the audience on online news articles are rarely replied to by journalists or local elites (Firmstone & Coleman, 2015). At best, these are horizontal conversations between citizens, but often the comments are not heard at all. Mainstream media have been slow to embrace the opportunities to interact and to host conversations generated by citizens (Paulussen et al., 2007).

The future of local journalism

So far, it is unclear whether the new forms of local digital media can countervail the decline of local newspapers. Some have expressed considerable optimism, arguing that the digital environment will provide the basis for journalistic innovation at the local level (e.g. Waldman, 2011) and has “the potential to support and broaden the range of local media content” (Ofcom, 2012: 103). Nielsen (2015), however, stated that the digital growth has far from made up for what has been lost on the print side of business. Whereas broadcasting has so far weathered the digital evolution better, television and radio are more often organized regionally than locally (Nielsen, 2015).

Traditional as well as new news services are still a long way from establishing sustainable business models for local news provision, partly because there has been insufficient innovation (Moore, 2015). Public policy towards local news is focused on managing the decline rather than enabling transition and experimentation. However, there is opportunity for innovation in local and regional journalism, due to a myriad

of digital newsgathering and publishing tools. Moreover, Thicket (2014) identified a significant increase in the number of citizens searching for local news content online and on mobile devices.

Hyperlocals may thus play a major role in compensating for the decline of local newspapers and become the key actor in holding public authorities accountable in the future. However, to be an effective watchdog, hyperlocals need support (Moore, 2014). Therefore, US foundations, such as the John & James Knight Foundation and the MacArthur, Rockefeller, Open Society and Ford Foundations, have supported innovation at the local level. Furthermore, private funders have invested in digital services that connect citizens within a community.

Over the last decades, foundations, philanthropists as well as governments have increasingly recognized the opportunities of funding contests. McKinsey and Company (2009) found that competitive funding is a powerful instrument for change and innovation and identified seven reasons for why: identifying excellence, influencing public perception, focusing communities on specific problems, mobilizing new talent, strengthening problem-solving communities, educating individuals and mobilizing capital.

Many European countries make public policy interventions at the local level and provide subsidies for the coverage of local news. Some EU countries maintain discounted VAT rates; France, for example, has approved legislation to align its discounted VAT rate of 2.1 per cent for newspapers with its rate for the digital press. In the UK, print newspapers benefit from a VAT zero rating. Hyperlocals do not receive the same subsidy and are taxed at the normal VAT rate (ENPA, 2014). More recently, as of October 2018, the European Council allows member states to apply reduced, super-reduced or zero VAT rates to electronic publications, thereby allowing the alignment of VAT rates for electronic and physical publications. This new reality is provisional in anticipation of a “definitive” VAT system.

Another policy option would be to assist charitably funded media (Townend, 2015). Charitable status brings both financial and reputational benefits. Charity law in most European countries does not recognize journalism as an explicit purpose, but there is no prohibition on producing media or news content as part of a company’s charitable activities. Local journalism and many hyperlocals are undoubtedly making important contributions to information, knowledge and democratic accountability. These civic gains need to be recognized through a more flexible charitable system that would both facilitate the growth of new and existing local news services and boost new initiatives (Townend, 2015).

Another example of growing *hyperlocals* is the Swedish local media landscape, which has become more complex in the digital era. The decline in centrally produced traditional media has affected local journalism in Sweden, and local newsrooms have closed down (Nygren et al., 2017). While traditional local media lick their wounds, new types of local media are growing. However, most *hyperlocals* grow in places where traditional media are present. In other words, these *hyperlocals* are only partly filling

the gaps left behind by the traditional media. Overall, the traditional media still offer good coverage in many places in Sweden, although the number of newsrooms is declining. Consequently, the future is not clear. In some parts of Sweden, the expansion of hyperlocals is making important contributions to the local democratic infrastructure. However, sparsely populated parts of Sweden often do not have local news providers, either on traditional platforms or on digital ones (Nygren et al., 2017). Understandably, urban, densely populated areas offer a better economic basis.

Case in point: Local news production in the Netherlands

In at least five Dutch cities, the regional newspaper has ceased to exist in recent years (affecting about 2% of all Dutch citizens), and, in almost one out of three cities, there is no longer an active local radio and television station. This evoked a central question: How many locally or regionally oriented news media are there actually in the Netherlands? More precisely, how many different news media channels can citizens on average choose from to obtain information about their municipality? Taking an interest in these developments, the Netherlands Journalism Fund has been conducting several research projects into the quantity and quality of the local news supply as well as the demand.

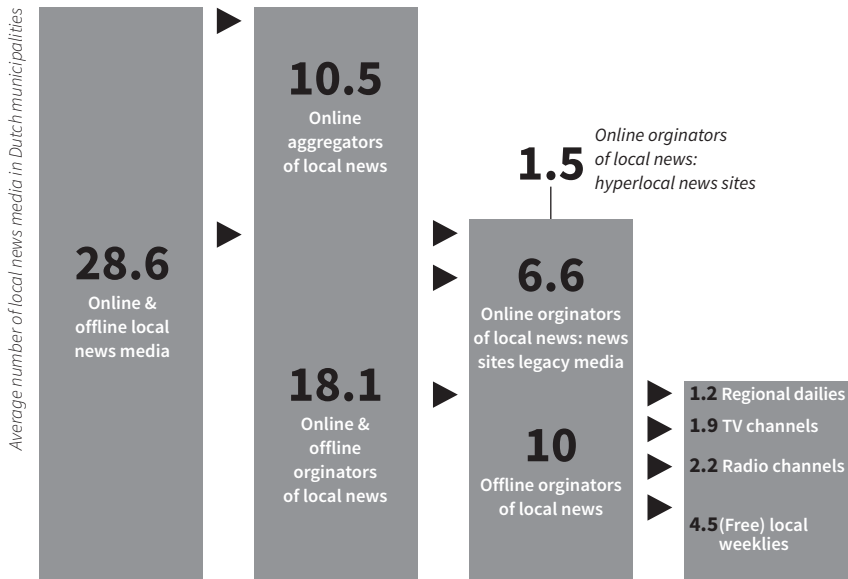
A study on the news infrastructure in regions

First, the Netherlands Journalism Fund monitored all the existing online and offline news media channels that could potentially provide local and regional news in all of the 418 municipalities in 2012.¹ In an average Dutch municipality, one can turn to 28.6 different channels for news about one's community (see Figure 1). Traditional offline media account for around one-third: 10 different media that potentially produce local news can be found outside the online world. Every municipality has on average 1.2 regional newspapers, 1.9 television channels, 2.2 radio stations and 4.3 local weeklies (some to be paid for and others free). Earlier research on the topic in the Netherlands showed similar numbers, although in 2005 there were still 11 traditional offline media per municipality, indicating a decline of 8 per cent. Furthermore, the study showed that on average 18.6 online news channels made up about two-thirds off all news channels. This is a huge number, considering that none of them existed a couple of years ago.

However, not all of the online channels provide news that has not been covered by traditional offline news channels: 6.6 out of them are online equivalents of newspapers and television/radio broadcasters. This leaves a staggering total of 12 independent online journalistic initiatives that are unaffiliated with traditional news channels. Here is the catch: only 1.5 are so-called *hyperlocals*. The other 10.5 online news chan-

1. In 2012, there were still 418 municipalities in the Netherlands; due to government-issued aggregates, the current number is 388.

Figure 1. Local watchdogs: Breakdown of news media



Source: Dutch Journalism Fund/www.svdj.nl

nels are *aggregators*: websites that, be it manually or automatically, crawl through the internet in search of news.

Hyperlocals turned out to be difficult to classify: some of them produce highly original content, daily updated material and hard news stories with professional journalistic standards, while others are a different ballgame entirely. Hyperlocals cannot always be seen as fully journalistic but usually involve benevolent amateurs who make news stories because they feel some sort of obligation towards their community. Due to lacking datelines, dates, sources and so on, some websites had to be dismissed because they were simply not produced along journalistic lines. As a result, only one out of every three *hyperlocals* could be indexed as original content creators.

The study revealed a trend of declining offline news channels and an increase in online news channels, although most of them did not create original content and did not contribute to the diversity of local news. In contrast, the ratio of original versus copied content has worsened considerably in recent years. If solely looking at original content, there are on average only 11.5 news channels, both online and offline, in each municipality. Why is this number so low? Most traditional media still see their online output as secondary, often resulting in them putting minimally adjusted offline content on their website. Thus, while a regional newspaper could potentially provide original content both on- and offline, in reality it publishes almost entirely the same material. This applies to local weeklies and local (commercial) radio as well as television stations.

So far, new media initiatives do not fill the gaps left behind by traditional media. On the contrary, in municipalities with a strong journalistic network and multiple traditional players, new initiatives like *hyperlocals* are more likely to sprout, in accordance with the so-called *flywheel* theory, stating that “news attracts news”.

One of the surprising results of the Netherlands Journalism Fund's research in 2012 was that the northern provinces of the Netherlands had on average almost twice as many news channels providing unique content than the provinces in the south. Why is there such a huge difference? More importantly, what does it mean?

To gain a firmer grip on the quality of regional and local news, all online news stories during 1 week in a sample of 80 municipalities were indexed. More specifically, the focus was on the watchdog function of the regional and local press. The subjects of this research were the websites of regional and local dailies, regional and local weeklies, regional and local broadcast stations and *hyperlocals*. Only media that produce unique content were taken into account for this part of the research. The central question was as follows: How many news productions do we come across in locally oriented media in an average week in 80 cities, and, more specifically, in how many of them does the local government play an active role?

The sample contained more than 5,000 news articles. About 400 of them (accounting for about 8 per cent) turned out to be non-unique – that is, not self-written or produced – material that was either blatantly copied from (local government) websites or minimally rewritten articles from other third parties. The remaining 4,627 news articles were original.

A total of 791 news items (17%) addressed local governmental issues. Furthermore, we found that 70 of the news items were *news-in-brief* – specifically short, basic news articles containing typically what/where/when core information. Not surprisingly, the length of those articles was limited, not even surpassing the 150 words mark, and 1 out of every 10 news items turned out to be a more serious background piece, containing 400 words or more. Additionally, interviews, reports, announcements alongside commentaries, columns and letters to the editor were identified. All those genres together added up to a little less than 20 per cent of the total.

About a dozen different types of subjects were identified, including culture, safety, sports, health care, traffic, housing, economy, governance, education, employment, political parties, finance, immigration and science. The vast majority of the news items – almost two-thirds – dealt either with sport, culture or safety.

City size

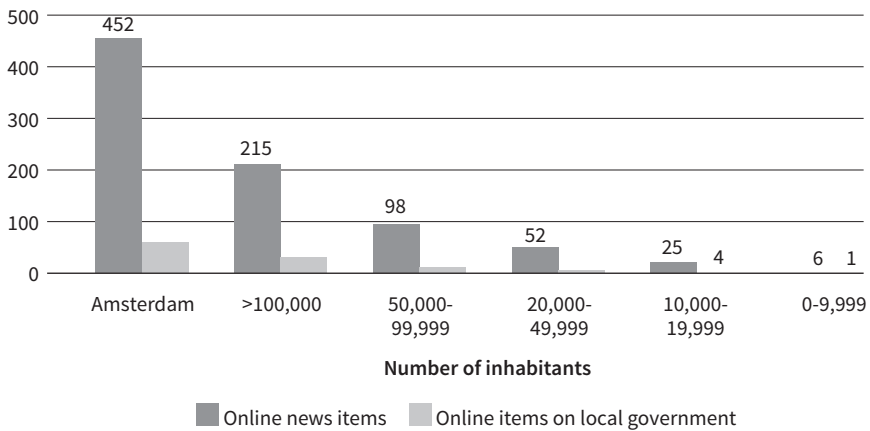
There seems to be a direct correlation between the population size of a city and the amount of news articles found, which raised the following question: To what extent does population size coincide with the amount of articles?

One could argue that larger cities by definition mean more activity. One is more likely to find hospitals, schools, universities, headquarters, institutions and, last but

not least, editorial offices of newspapers in large cities or regional capitals than in smaller cities and more rural areas. Those institutions generate news and logically turn a city into a “news machine”.

Large cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants have on average 215 news items per week; 36 of them concern the affairs of local government. Readers in cities with 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants see half that amount of articles (98 and 16). In the smallest subject categories, we find almost no news articles written at all. What emerges is an online journalistic wasteland in many smaller municipalities in the Netherlands. In some cities, only 4 articles were found in a whole week, and none of them dealt with local governmental issues. Clearly, there is a direct relation between the city size and the amount of original news content generated (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Average amount of news items per municipality (2013)



Regional versus local

Regional newspapers and broadcasters are retreating from rural areas, mostly due to cutbacks and reorganizations. Regional media can no longer penetrate the thinnest capillaries of our journalistic bloodstream. One of the particularly interesting issues was the relation between regional and local news media. Does the theory of communicating vessels apply in this situation? Are municipalities devoid of regional news media seeing an increase in local news media or are the latter absent as well?

A significant causal link was found between the two different types of news media. If regional media provide less news, the chances of finding local media that produce original content decrease as well, and vice versa. This is true for news in general and particularly for news on government issues, advocating the preservation, expansion and strengthening of existing media networks. Concluding, the media still produce more offline content than online. Offline media are rapidly losing terrain and subscribers,

while online media are still struggling to break even, let alone make a profit. Similar to local and smaller media, hyperlocals also appear in regions where regional and/or larger media are already active.

Follow-up research combining news supply and audience use

In 2014, follow-up research commissioned by the Netherlands Journalism Fund was conducted in which both offline and online local news platforms were taken into account. The most prominent result of 2012, that is, the near-absence of local news (especially on politics) in smaller municipalities, was used as a starting point for further exploration. Two periods were chosen for data collection: one constructed week in February–March and a second one in September–October. To gain an indicative view of the Netherlands, 11 big cities (>50,000 inhabitants) and 15 smaller municipalities (<50,000 inhabitants) were selected. First, all local news items were labelled with regard to the subject matter covered (e.g. economics, education, environment, etc.). Second, all news items that concerned local politics were labelled according to the journalistic styles (short news, background article, interview and opinion) and the sources used by the author (politician, businessman, civilian, etc.). In addition to analysing the news content, the consumption of local news was mapped in all of the 26 towns. The study generated the following results: background stories on local politics could only be found in dailies, and, while inhabitants of big towns saw about four of these on a weekly basis, their counterparts in small towns at most came across one background story per week. This evidence points to a discrepancy between a greater need for local content in small municipalities and a considerably thinner supply.

Discussion

The Dutch experience, as well as other examples in Europe, shows us that, so far, new media initiatives have not filled the gaps left behind by traditional media. On the contrary, in municipalities with a strong journalistic network and multiple traditional players, new initiatives like *hyperlocals* are more likely to sprout. The *flywheel* theory turns out to find strong support: “news creates and attracts news”. If, for instance, a smaller city lacks a regional daily, it is also less likely to find a hyperlocal in that city. This finding contrasts the *communicating vessels* theory, arguing that, in grey zones with fewer news producers, others will automatically fill that vacuum. This theory was not supported by the Dutch evidence.

A range of positive interventions to address the growing democratic deficit has already been proposed, for example establishing a contestable fund for news, allowing news organizations to establish themselves as charities, creating news hubs and hastening the release of open data. Local journalists now have access to amounts of

open data that were previously unavailable or limitedly accessible (Moore, 2015). This lowers the cost of performing local journalism in terms of finance as well as time. In 2013, the UK set an example in making government data free due to legislation to safeguard the release of data across local governments (Davies, 2013). However, compared with the US, where foundations and private investors have filled the subsidy gap, most innovators in European member states have been starved of funds and the capacity to innovate (Moore, 2015). Hence, the experimentation power is limited in scope and the transition from print to digital is running too slowly. The current differences in VAT regimes within the same markets are not helpful either. If governments want to stimulate online publications, the VAT rates of print and e-publications should be aligned. Preferably the lowest VAT rate should be applied to create a level playing field and foster content diversity.

Consequently, there is a danger that technology organizations (often not European) will colonize the local territory. Digital intermediaries, such as Google and Facebook, have no ambition to perform the public service watchdog function and could thus accelerate the decline in local media. They could also finance experimentation aimed at finding a business model to support local news, and sometimes this does occur. One example is the Amsterdam-based *Bureau voor Lokale Zaken* (Bureau for Local Issues), which, with a starting fund from the Digital News Initiative Fund (Google), became a prototype of a digital online collaborative dashboard, meant to foster the collaboration between local investigative journalists, experts and citizen journalists.

Some national governments have recently decided to free up considerable amounts of money to support local and regional journalism: until 2021, the Dutch government allocates up to 5 million euros yearly to research, local and regional journalism. In the coming 5 years, the Canadian government will invest up to 32 million euros in 1 or more independent NGOs supporting local journalism in remote and disenfranchised communities. This subsidy will also serve to establish new business models. In 2017, the Norwegian government dedicated 2.1 million euros to “journalism important for society”. Several cities in the Netherlands have decided to raise money for similar initiatives.

In sum, it is up to us as a society to decide how uncomfortable we feel with local and regional news inequalities, and what we want to do about it.

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Transforming the news media

Overcoming old and new gender inequalities

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Gender inequalities have been at the core of debates and studies about media and communication for a long time. The media – as meaning-making institutions, and as an important economic sector – have been recognized as both a hindrance to advancements in gender equality across societies, and a possible solution to persisting stereotypes and discrimination. In this chapter we build on a consolidated body of knowledge and map out current international initiatives aimed at mainstreaming gender in and through the media; but we also argue that new lenses and approaches are needed to understand current transformations, mostly due to digital developments and globalization processes. We do so by addressing questions concerning the impact and implications of digital technologies in relation to working conditions in the news media, and by discussing the potential for change that may derive from gender-aware media policies and regulatory mechanisms in a multi-actor and multi-level environment.

December 2017. *Time* magazine devotes its cover to a collective “person of the year”: “the silence breakers”,¹ those women, from all walks of life, who have come to speak publicly of the harassment, abuses, and violence they underwent in their working environments. What started with individual acts of courage has grown into an emerging global movement, connected from the US to France and China by hashtags like #metoo, #balancetonporc and #WoYeShi having been used millions of times in more than eighty countries. In a few weeks, a multiplicity of initiatives – from lists of alleged perpetrators to open letters published on major newspapers and joint declarations² – have attracted public attention globally. Controversial debates have involved

1. <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers-choice/>.

2. In India a list of 60 academics from across the country, accused of harassing behaviours, was posted on Facebook in November 2017, sparking wide debate amongst Indian feminists: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/metoo-and-himtoo-come-to-india/>. In France a letter published in *Le Monde*, signed by around 100 French women writers, performers and academics deplored the wave of “denunciations” that has followed claims of sexually assaulted women over decades in the US and elsewhere: <http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable->

well known female media professionals and movie stars, thus receiving even broader attention in the media.

January 2018. Carrie Gracie, BBC China editor, leaves the company after discovering she had been, for years, paid much less than male colleagues occupying similar positions. In an open letter to BBC audience,³ Gracie denounced “not only (the) unacceptably high pay for top presenters and managers but also an indefensible pay gap between men and women doing equal work ... I simply want the BBC to abide by the law and value men and women equally”. In consideration of the *Equality Act 2010*, which states that men and women doing equal work must receive equal pay, two hundred BBC women have made complaints only to be told repeatedly there is no pay discrimination in the company. Gracie asks: “Can we all be wrong?”. BBC, a model public broadcasting assumed as a standard across the world, must face accusations of illegally perpetrating an unequal system of gender pay gap.

January 2018. The International Women’s Media Foundation launches a new global campaign: “Make 2018 the year we end the sexual harassment of women journalists!”, while Madrid-based Platform for the Defence of Free Expression (PDLI) announces the creation of an observatory to monitor the harassment of female journalists on social media in Spain, in cooperation with the Spanish Federation of Journalist Unions (FeSP). Referring to a study conducted by the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OCSE 2016), the PDLI denounces the harassment of female journalists as a growing threat to free expression. According to the study, hate speech online, extremely aggressive verbal tones and violent threats increasingly affect female journalists: A reflection of profoundly misogynous attitudes that social media can easily amplify, too often ending up threatening and silencing women who occupy positions where from they can make their voices heard.

The above-mentioned events are but the latest evidence in a long trajectory of gender inequalities that have involved the media and have been denounced for decades: the media have been exposed as a system where inequality between women and men can easily lead to abusive behaviours; the media contribute to framing/silencing inequality issues on the agenda; and the media, especially digital, are being used to mobilize against the persistence of patriarchal norms and structures, from Cinecittà to Hollywood.⁴ A chain of old and new inequalities that today seems to gain renewed

a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html#eaS2UVg9T1IXi0cj.99. In Italy a joint statement – entitled “Dissenso comune” (Common dissent) – was released on February 1, 2018, by 120 women from the communication and movie industry, denouncing the system of gender inequalities in the country; and calling on all women to rewrite spaces of work and create a society able to reflect new equilibrium between women and men.

3. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/jan/08/carrie-gracie-letter-in-full>.

4. World known presenter and actress Oprah Winfrey, in accepting the Cecil B. DeMille Award at Sunday’s Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, California, expressed her gratitude to all the women who have endured years of abuse and assault, and have not been heard or believed if they dared to speak their truth to the power of those men. The media across the globe has re-launched her call “Their time is up.”

public recognition. As Denis McQuail states in his chapter in this volume, “differential representation of women treats women as inferiors to male protagonists or just as invisible”. He continues that, in relation to gender, the notion “equality” is problematic since “the reality of most societies has involved discrimination against women”. In the same vein, Hannu Nieminen in this volume highlights the importance of digitization as generating new forms and modalities of inequality that are still overlooked.

Gender inequalities and the media

Indeed “inequality” has been a major concern for feminist media scholars for decades, resulting in a consolidated subfield in media studies that has explored media content, as well as media operations and structures, working cultures and technological developments. Studies have been conducted across regions, cultural contexts and media genres. Issues of representation, working conditions, pay gaps, participation in decision-making roles have been explored and critically analysed (Byerly, 2012; Carter, Steiner & McLaughlin, 2014; Gallagher, 2005, 2014; McLaughlin & Carter, 2013; Ross, 2013).

Inequality “through the media” has been investigated in relation to the stereotyped representation of women, biased portrayal and the use of degrading images and language in media outlets, formats and genres, since the early ‘70s, from mass media (Tuchman et al., 1975) to filming characterization (Humm, 1977). Specifically focusing on the news media, data concerning unequal treatment of women and men as subjects in the news have been provided by the world-known Global Media Monitoring Project since 1995. The latest project Report (GMMP, 2015) once more highlighted a problematic reality: In 2015, women still made up only 24 per cent of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news, exactly as they did in 2010. The journalistic gender lens in source selection is not only male centred, but also skewed towards a certain kind of masculinity when selecting interviewees for all types of views, from “expert” opinion to “ordinary” person testimonies. Looking for news practices that may help promoting change, like a focus on issues of concern of women (as well as other social groups), the GMMP report also highlighted that only 9 per cent of stories overall contained reference to legal rights or policy frameworks and that only 4 per cent of stories clearly challenged gender stereotypes; a one percentage point change since 2005.

Inequality “in the media” has been a parallel concern. One of the first efforts to document gender inequalities in decision-making was a UNESCO-commissioned report titled “Women and Media Decision-making: The Invisible Barriers” (Gallagher, 1987). Structural, organizational and behavioural inequalities were again identified as elements characterizing the sector some ten years later, in a 1995 study across 43 nations, focusing on employment patterns in the media (Gallagher, 1995). In 2005, women’s experiences of broadcast journalism indicated that despite the numbers entering the industry, they did not proportionately advance into decision-making roles (Carter et al., 1998).

Similar results emerged from a 2012 investigation promoted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) across 99 media companies in 28 European countries. The study showed that women occupy only 16 per cent of the top level decision-making positions (CEOs or company president) while their participation in decision-making, at all levels, from CEO to head of unit and board members, is only 32 per cent on average. The proportion of women in leadership positions tends to be higher in public media organisations, but significant differences are found across Europe (EIGE, 2013; see also Ross and Padovani, 2017).

Focusing on the world's regions, the "Global Report on the Status of Women in the Media" (IWMF 2012) exposed the global dimension of the problem. Examining more than 500 companies in 59 countries, researchers found that 73 per cent of top management jobs are occupied by men worldwide. Some regional features and differences were also highlighted: the highest representation of women in both governance and top management was found in Eastern Europe (33% and 43%, respectively) and Nordic Europe (36% and 37%, respectively),⁵ while in Asia and Oceania women were barely 13 per cent of those in senior management.

Finally, a study made public by Nordicom in February 2018, titled "The media is a male business", reveals that "The leadership of the 100 largest international media corporations is dominated by men." Across all major transnational companies – those that produce content for print, television, film and online properties, as well as cable companies that control the distribution of programming and produce content themselves – gender inclusiveness in leadership and managerial positions remains a highly problematic issue: "The male dominance crosses national borders and is visible in all types of media corporations. On average, 80 per cent of directors are men, 17 per cent of top management officers are women and there are only six female CEOs leading corporations on the top-100 list" (Nordicom, 2018).

These data show that gender inequalities are a worldwide reality that calls for renewed efforts in untangling the constellation of factors which systematically "discourage and block women's entry into the news field, push those who made it out of the profession, and keep those who have endured down and siloed in specific roles away from decision-making and policy-setting positions." (Melki & Mallat, 2017: 57).

Addressing gender inequalities in and through the media: A global concern

Though loosely defined, "gender equality" has thus become a "master frame" and a "policy goal" in gender and media scholarship as well as in professional venues. Over the past twenty-plus years, a growing awareness of the issues at stake is demonstrated by interventions by federations of public broadcasters, from the European Broadcasting Union's "Charter for Equal Opportunities for Women in Broadcasting" adopted in 1995, to the most recent initiatives launched by the Permanent Conference of Public Broadcasters

5. For an explanation of similar results characterizing very different cultural and historical contexts, see IWMF Report, Chapters 5 and 6.

in the Mediterranean (COPEAM) and its Gender Equality Commission. International professional organizations have been created with the specific aim of transforming gendered structures in television, film, radio and web-based journalism, amongst which the International Association of Women in Radio & Television (IAWRT), the International Media Women Foundation (IWMF) and the South African Gender Links.

International unions have also given priority to the need to overcome gender-related inequalities in the news media, such as the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), whose longstanding commitment to gender equality is demonstrated by a number of publications and toolkits (IFJ 2012; IFJ & UNESCO 2009; IFJ & WACC 2012) and, most recently, by the appointment of a Gender Council, the work of which has been officially included in the IFJ Constitution in 2016.

Regional and international governmental organizations have also been active in denouncing and contrasting gender inequalities in the media. Alongside a long list of studies and provisions emanated from European institutions, we can mention the EIGE's inclusion of gender and media issues in their follow up to the Beijing Platform for Action and in their Dataset of Good Practices to promote gender equality.⁶ Furthermore, in the context of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UNESCO has developed programs and tools to foster gender equality in and through the media, including a set of "Gender-sensitive Indicators for Media" (2012); and UN Women has launched a "Step It Up for Gender Equality Media Compact" 2015, urging major transnational media corporations to disrupt stereotypes and biases, and increase the number of women, particularly in leadership and decision-making functions. Finally, it is worth mentioning the review theme addressed at the 62nd gathering of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), in New York in March 2018: "Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women".

All these interventions reflect a growing awareness of the unequal conditions that affect women and men, and reproduce gendered relations in the media sector well into the 21st century. Though some progress has been made over the years, all international studies (EIGE 2013; GMMP, 2015; IWMF, 2012) highlight the slow pace of change and the risk of step-backs that prevent the consolidation of equality practices. In this context, it is to be highlighted that on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing in 1995) – where Women and Media issues were included as one of the priority areas to achieve gender equality in society⁷ – another international initiative was launched, with the support of UNESCO: a Global

6. See: <http://eige.europa.eu/beijing-platform-for-action>. Good practices in gender mainstreaming in the media sector can be found at: [http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices?topic\[\]=627](http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices?topic[]=627).

7. Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action addressed the diverse inequality issues affecting women in the media and included a number of Recommendations for governments, international organizations, the media themselves and civic organizations. The text can be found at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

Alliance for Media and Gender (GAMAG) which brings together a plurality of engaged stakeholders – governmental and non-governmental, professional and academic – and is conceived as a global movement to promote gender equality in and through media.

One of the outcomes of the GAMAG is an evolving global agenda (IAMCR/Unesco 2014; IAMCR/GAMAG/Unesco forthcoming 2018). From general concerns for women's communication rights to feminist perspectives on communication and media in digital times, a comprehensive research agenda to tackle ever-changing dimensions of inequality is in the making; one that highlights a plurality of issues from sexualisation and pornography in ICT content, to safety of women journalists offline and online, gender mainstreaming in broadcasting organisations and women's political participation in media, as well as gender-sensitive curricula for media professionals.

Known unknowns about media gender inequalities

Some of these themes have been widely investigated over the past decades, but today new lenses and approaches are needed to understand current transformations, mostly due to digital developments and globalization processes. Implications for education and working conditions in the news-making sector, new skills and abilities needed in a transformed technological environment, exposure and safety of professionals through the social media, are all new issues to be explored in their gendered nature.

Other issues, though on the agenda for decades, have attracted limited attention, both in scholarly circles and in the practice of media companies and institutional actors. Amongst these are the nexus between media gender inequalities and policy interventions at different levels. Interestingly, these aspects are today widely referred to in official documents and debates. In response to this widespread call for specific attention on policy aspects, we argue that theoretically sound and comprehensive analytical frameworks are needed to acquire proper understanding of the “what, why and how” of regulatory arrangements (Padovani, 2014a, 2018; Padovani & Pavan, 2017).

In the following paragraphs we focus on two aspects, with the aim of fostering a better understanding of how gender unequal relations are reproduced and transformed in contemporary media: the impact and implications of digital technologies in relation to working conditions are discussed in the next paragraph, while issues concerning the adoption of regulatory measures are elaborated upon in the following one, providing an account of policy-related research, current debates and practices in a multi-level perspective.

In this way, we address two of the underlying questions addressed in this collection, with a focus on gendered relations: What role do digital technologies play in creating and/or reducing inequalities? In what way and to what extent do media and communication (policies), in different countries and regions, contribute to overcoming inequalities?

In elaborating on the two aspects, we aim at contributing to the above-mentioned research agenda. We also acknowledge some of the many good practices that have

been elaborated to foster gender equality, specifically in the areas of digital news making and of policy formulation. In the concluding remarks, we propose an analytical framework that may help positioning the two aspects discussed in this chapter in the broader context of media inequalities analysis; a framework that invites addressing different dimensions of inequality at their intersections, while stressing the centrality of policy interventions in the search for sustainable solutions.

Gender inequalities revised: Participation and working conditions related to digital skills and data journalism

When studying working conditions and participation in news production from a gender perspective, it is important to take into account transitions in the news industry (Fenton, 2010; Paulussen & Ugille, 2010; Usher, 2015). These trends had an impact on the routines, professional practices and work environment of journalists (Liu, 2006; McChesney, 2004; McNair, 1998). It has been repeatedly demonstrated that the intensified work regime combined with the arrival of digital technologies results in an increased demand for multi-skilled journalists that can produce content for print, audio-visual, and online platforms (Quinn & Filak, 2005; Vergeer, Pleijter & Hermans, 2011). Although technological innovation cannot be considered the sole driver of change, its impact on different layers of the journalistic profession cannot be underestimated (Compton, 2010). This part of the chapter differentiates between two consequences related to digitalization and offers insight into their gendered repercussions.

First, technological changes in the production process have influenced journalists' routines and working conditions in general. Journalism scholars have focused on the adoption of technology in newsrooms (Boczkowski, 2004; Garrison, 2001; Maier, 2000). These studies have shown that there is a growing demand for digital skills such as basic or more advanced computer skills, social media skills, audio-visual editing, and mobile technology skills. Second, in an increasingly digitalized context, technologically driven forms of journalism have emerged. Data journalism is one of these forms, situated between journalism and the computer field (Borges-Rey, 2016; Fink & Anderson, 2015; Gynnild, 2014; Stavelin, 2013). In data journalism, "traditional journalistic working methods are mixed with data analysis, programming and visualization techniques" (Nygren, Appelgren & Huttenrauch, 2012, as cited in Appelgren & Nygren, 2014: 394). Characteristic of data journalism is its multifaceted interactions with the field of computer sciences (Weber & Rall, 2012; Lewis & Usher, 2014). This interaction results in an exchange of cultural values between data journalism and the computer field.

It is necessary to ask questions about the gender aspects of technological innovation in the profession. The field of feminist technology studies has considered the relationship of gender and technology (Bray, 2007; Bury, 2011; Faulkner, 2001; Valgaeren, 2001; Wajcman, 2007; Youngs, 2005); and we build on those studies to gain insight into the gender dimensions of the consequences related to technological innovation in

journalism. This part of the chapter is based on a PhD research on the gender dimensions of technological innovation in journalism, based on qualitative interviews with a cross-national sample of 27 journalists from different generations, media sectors, and positions that had varying levels of digital expertise (De Vuyst, 2016).

Digital skills

Technological innovation offers both challenges and opportunities for female journalists. First, digital skills are increasingly important in journalism in general. Particularly more advanced ICT skills related to programming, coding and data visualization, are associated with high levels of status. Both the evaluation and accumulation of digital skills appear to be gendered (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017). Several female interviewees had experienced that their digital skills are evaluated based on a gender binary. Their technological competence was often doubted and they had the feeling that they had to prove their digital skills twice as much as their male colleagues. This is in line with previous research on women in the ICT sector that shows that ICT skills are gendered based on the stereotype that men are “naturally” more technologically competent than women (Faulkner, 2001; Henwood, 1998). Also female journalists often took a subject position of lower self-confidence towards digital skills than their male colleagues.

Furthermore, the study indicated that the accumulation of digital skills is also gendered (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017). The majority of the participants had not gained their digital expertise through traditional journalism education, but through self-study, for example, by participating in online courses, hackathons, and evening classes. Participation demanded an additional time investment after working hours. For several female interviewees, the difficult combination of a disproportional share of the household tasks with a job in journalism prevented them from staying up to date with all the latest innovations.

Data journalism

The gender perspective in data journalism is double. On the one hand, several interviewed data journalists had the impression that data journalism is a new field that was still open to everyone – regardless of gender (De Vuyst, 2018). They believed that digital skills were more important than personal network relationships for entering and building a career in data journalism. This had gendered consequences. First, several women entered data journalism to avoid barriers that limited their opportunities in traditional journalism (Melin, 2008), for example, the old boy’s network, the gendered division of news topics and sexism.

On the other hand, data journalism was not completely free of gender-related obstacles. Positions and roles in data journalism were considered gendered. As the participants in the research described: coding and development are still perceived as “the geeky part” of data journalism, and geeky implies less access for women. This is

in line with offered explanations for the underrepresentation of women in the computer field, in the sense that it is associated with a geek mythology, which is not in accordance with the female gender role (Corneliussen, 2014; Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Rasmussen & Håpnes, 1991; Turkle, 1984). One could suppose that the traditional glass ceiling is accompanied by the implications of a coding ceiling (De Vuyst, 2018).

Empowerment through technology

Nevertheless, female interviewees also described strategies in relation to digital skills that are aimed at improving their status in the profession (De Vuyst, 2018; De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017). Some female journalists were expressing their passion for technology and demonstrating their skills in ways that did not conform to traditional gender expectations. They were aiming for empowerment through technology. In these networks, female journalists collaborated with women in the computer field to increase their digital skills and break stereotypes. The experience of similar gender barriers created a sense of solidarity and a spirit of emancipation. The advantages of these initiatives are not only related to the digital training possibilities, but also to the positive impact and self-confidence building of female journalists towards digital technology.

Media gender inequalities: Searching for policy interventions

Since the Beijing Conference in 1995, developing gender-aware media policies has been indicated as one of the steps to be taken in order to meet the goals of Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action (PfA): Namely, promoting equal access to the media and decision-making (J1), and eliminating gender stereotypes in media content (J2). The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) called upon governments and other actors to promote “an active policy of mainstreaming of a gender perspective in (media) policies and programs” (par. 237). Furthermore, it called for media organizations themselves to “elaborate and strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms and codes of conduct” to comply with the objectives in Section J (par. 236 and 244.a/b). Those recommendations have been restated on various international occasions, from the Commission on the Status of Women⁸ to the World Summit on Information Society.⁹

8. At its 47th meeting, in March 2003, the Commission on the Status of Women, highlighted the risk that gender “differences (in representation, access and use of media and information technologies) have important implications for policy development at national, regional and international levels (CSW47 2003_Final, par. 2). In its final Report, the Commission indicated, as a very first Recommendation for action, that of ensuring “women’s early and full participation in the development and implementation of national policies, legislation, ... strategies and regulatory and technical instruments in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT) and media and communications” while creating adequate “monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation of gender-sensitive policies and regulations as well as to analyse the gender impact of such policies” (CSW47 2003_Final, par. 4a).

9. See the WSIS “Plan of Action” adopted in Geneva in December 2003, par. C6 Enabling Environments: “Governments, in collaboration with stakeholders, are encouraged to formulate conducive

In spite of such explicit recognition of the centrality of regulatory arrangements to promote and sustain gender equality in the media and ICTs, the recommendations made since Beijing have been widely disregarded by policy and media actors alike across the world's regions and policy levels (Padovani & Pavan 2017).

What policies for media gender equality?

A few scholars have adopted a gender lens when focusing on supranational debates around media and communication, and resulting policy documents (Gallagher, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014; Jensen, 2008, 2010, 2013). Reflecting on events such as the Beijing Conference, UNESCO-promoted initiatives or the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), they have highlighted the main areas of concern expressed on those circles, i.e. how gender issues are framed; persisting stereotyped depictions of men and women in media and ICT content; increase in online pornographic materials; the need for broad dissemination of information about women's rights, and of orienting the media and ICTs towards values such as respect and non-discrimination; the need to build infrastructure and communications networks that benefit women; and concerns about education, training and career development.

Critical reflections have also highlighted gender gaps in the very conduct of international encounters, as well as their implication for the design of policy interventions. They have done so by highlighting the lack of women presence, voices and expertise; a prevailing rhetorical reference to "women's issue", and a limited understanding of the structural gender inequalities that characterize the media; the lack of sex disaggregated data upon which informed recommendations should be made, and of gender-sensitive analysis of the social, cultural and economic situations that affect media access e use; difficulties in acknowledging gender differences in the ideation, implementation and evaluation phases of media and ICT policies (Drossou & Jensen 2003-2005; Doria 2015; Gurumurthy & Chami 2010, 2014).

At the level of the European Union, recent studies have highlighted how policy-making related to the media and audio-visual industries, as well as to digital developments, has been characterized by a lack of attention to gender (equality) issues (Padovani, 2016). Furthermore, in spite of the many interventions carried out by European institutions to tackle issues of stereotypical representation in media and advertising, and equal access to decision-making positions in the sector, the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament have often addressed the problems on the basis of different, and sometimes contrasting, priorities (Ross & Padovani, 2017). Negotiation between conflicting values – in particular gender equality and mainstreaming¹⁰ versus freedom of expression – have often prevented

ICT policies that foster entrepreneurship, innovation and investment, and with particular reference to the promotion of participation by women". Accessible at: http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1161|1160.

10. Proposed as a transformative approach to gender inequalities since the Beijing Conference, "gender mainstreaming" has been considered an "organizing principle" to ensure that decision-making takes

placing gender-related issues at the core of media policy initiatives (Gallagher, 2011), while “soft measures” – essentially recommendations to media organizations to adopt self-regulatory measures – have been the main result of policy interventions (Sarikakis & Nguyen, 2009).

Comprehensive and comparative research at the national level is yet to be conducted in order to assess the extent to which gender mainstreaming has been implemented in media policies, and how far national strategies for gender equality acknowledge the centrality of the media and digital technologies. In this respect, only preliminary findings of a “Global Survey on Gender and Media” (UNESCO, 2016) are available, showing that just 35 per cent of world governments have integrated gender in their national media policies and programs.

An explicit commitment of independent media regulatory authorities would also be relevant to the politics of media gender equality. Initial attempts to map good practices,¹¹ including those carried out by regulatory bodies, result in a problematic picture of the extent to which such entities explicitly assume gender equality as a core component of their mandate. A meaningful exception in this area is the *Réseau Francophone des Régulateurs des Médias*, which conducted a comparative study of the policies and measures on gender equality promoted by member regulators (RE-FRAM, 2011), resulting in the adoption of a Declaration for Equality Between Men and Women in the Audiovisual Media.

Finally, internally adopted policies by media organizations are to be considered: Voluntary measures such as gender-equality plans, policies for maternal and paternal leave, policies to contrast sexual harassment, codes of conduct that define the basic principles and goals according to which gender-aware media should operate, and sometimes establish, support mechanisms. These aspects have been investigated in recent international studies.

According to the EIGE study on *Advancing gender equality in decision-making in media industries* (EIGE, 2013), only 26 per cent of selected ninety-nine media organizations across Europe (including all public broadcasters and major private companies) have a gender equality policy or code of conduct in place; 21 per cent have equality of opportunities or diversity policies (EIGE, 2013: 37; Ostlin & Nenadich 2017).

Similarly, the *Global Report on the Status of Women in the Media* (IWME, 2012), reported that slightly more than half of the 522 surveyed companies across the world

into account men's and women's different interests and needs (Wiener 2007); and defined as “The systematic integration of the respective situations, priorities and needs of women and men in all policies and with a view to promoting equality between women and men and mobilizing all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account, at the planning stage, their effects on the respective situations of women and men in implementation, monitoring and evaluation” (European Commission COM(96)67 final). For a discussion on its application in European communication/digital strategies, see Padovani 2016.

11. We refer to an EU-funder project entitled “Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries” (AGEMI) the aim of which is to disseminate good practices for gender equality in the media; and to a series of policy-relevant good practices collected in the context of another EU-funded project called “Med-Media” aimed at supporting media reforms in the Southern Mediterranean region.

have an established company-wide policy on gender equity. The average masks very different situations: from 16 per cent policy adoption in Eastern Europe to 69 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe. Some regions, including Eastern Europe and Southern Africa, show quite consistent patterns in the adoption of policy measures and support mechanisms at the organizational level; while meaningful internal variability characterizes other regions, like the Americas, the Middle East and North Africa. Circumstances within each geo-cultural context – such as gender-related cultural orientation and traditions, the existence of national equity normative frameworks, the status of women in society, and women’s empowerment (IWME, 2011: 34) – may play a role in fostering policy adoption, but are yet to be investigated. The same goes for the relationship between national laws and workplace policies, as well as the possible impact of internal measures’ adoption on more gender equal media performance.¹²

Why gender-responsive media policies?

The existence of legal frameworks at the national level, or of self-regulatory measures and support mechanisms within media organizations, suggest that institutions and the media acknowledge gender inequalities and put in place instruments to address them. On the contrary, the low level of adoption reflects either a gender-neutral approach – where the media intend to operate on the basis of merit and do not feel it necessary to do anything which advantages women – or, more often, a gender-blind approach – where media organizations believe they do not have a problem with discrimination (EIGE, 2013: 38).

Beyond signaling stakeholders’ commitment, the adoption of regulatory measures can also anticipate and foster change. Within media organizations, formally adopted equality policies and support mechanisms are core to define principles and goals, and also provide a framework to assess progress (Gallagher, 2011, 2014, 2017). National-level media policies are necessary means to promote the cultural transformation that would lead to a more equal redistribution of material as well as symbolic resources (Chaher, 2014). International normative frameworks that articulate gender equality for both traditional and digital media can be key towards mainstreaming gender in communication governing arrangements (Padovani, 2014b). Moreover, in a situation where it is clear that progress is not a linear process and step-backs are always a possibility (GMMP, 2015), policy measures can contribute to guarantee sustainability of positive achievements in more equal gender relations over time by establishing sanctioning elements (Gallagher, 2011, 2017). At the same time, it is to be noted that policy formulation and adoption may become a challenge to mainstreaming gender equality: too often policies and program are adopted, but implementation remains

12. Initial explorations in this directions are being made in the context of a Swedish Council of Research-funded international projects – Comparing Gender and Media Equality across the Globe (info at: <https://jmg.gu.se>) – where datasets from different international projects have been consolidated in a single database, for the first time allowing investigating possible correlations between different variables concerning gender inequality in the media. Resulting publications are expected by 2019.

weak. This may be due to limited effort in accompanying formal provisions with support measures like mentoring or monitoring programs, training of managerial staff, the establishment of gender councils. Other times, formal measures are the result of a state's or organization's commitment to normative frameworks, but no serious consideration is given to the needed transformation of organizational cultures. Moreover, when policies are in place a "normalization" effect may intervene, and no further commitments are made to make gender mainstreaming a reality (EIGE, 2013; IWMF, 2012; Ross & Padovani, 2017).

Therefore, persistence of gender inequality patterns and the limited knowledge acquired to date on the policy dimension, invite a better understanding of the relevance of policy in meeting the goal of gender equality in and through the media. Aspects that would require further investigation include: The extent of policy adoption and related constraints; the roles and interests of different stakeholders in fostering regulatory arrangements (see Chaher, 2014; Von Lurzer, 2017); the discursive frames according to which gender inequalities are addressed in policy documents (Lombardo & Meier, 2009); the tension between conflicting principles that guide media operations (Gallagher, 2011); and the actual implementation of those principles and provisions (Engeli et al., 2015). More research – focused, transnational, and comparative – is needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how policies relate to gender equality in practice, in different geo-cultural and socio-economic contexts.

What's next?

Future research to better understand (digital) media gendered realities and policy design to counter inequalities, should first acknowledge that both "gender" and "equality" are highly contested concepts, and the very meaning of "gender equality" is transformed according to the context of use (Verloo, 2007; Lombardo & Meier, 2009). Even in the media field, there is no agreed upon definition of what "gender equality" means: The problem is raised, the plural dimensions of inequality affecting women in the sector are highlighted, but the two key concepts are seldom problematized. "Gender equality" often ends up being used as a buzzword whose meaning is taken for granted, while different understandings characterize the use of the concept by different actors. This situation, and conceptual gap, may limit the possibility to design and implement adequate solutions. Efforts should therefore be made to problematize concepts and policy issues (Bacchi 1999, 2012), and to acknowledge, for instance, the contribution of intersectional scholarship (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; Hancock, 2007) that invite due consideration for the multiple and intersecting axes of domination that constitute unequal relations in the media environment.

Secondly, theoretically grounded definitions should be elaborated in support of both research and policy interventions. Positioning our contribution in a tradition of "gender policy analysis" that looks at structural dynamics of unequal gendered

relations in society,¹³ we hereby propose an operational definition of media gender equality that may guide future research:

A condition whereby equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities in the media and communication environment are enjoyed by every person, irrespective of their sex, and in due consideration of the multiple intersections between gendered relations and other axes of unequal power relations, based on ethnicity, age, class or sexual orientation. Gender equality in and through the media and ICT is, therefore, a goal for policy interventions – including the adoption of codes and standards, formal and informal governing arrangements – at the level of individual media, national laws and regulation, supranational agreements and transnational advocacy efforts. Such interventions should consider the interplay of different dimensions of gender inequality, including content and representation of women and men, participation and access to infrastructures and managerial positions, work and financial resources, information and knowledge, education and violence.¹⁴

This definition offers a basis from which to interrogate both research and policy interventions as to their capacity to reflect and address the multiplicity of interrelated gendered practices and meanings (Walby, 2009), thus focusing on processes that characterize, produce, reproduce or challenge gender disparities in the media domain.

As a contribution to future analyses, we also propose to think of these systems of practices, meanings, and processes as *media gender equality regimes* (Padovani, 2018). Bridging International Relation theory (Krasner, 1992; Onuf, 1989) and Gender Studies (Connell, 2009; Walby, 2004, 2009; Kardam, 2004), the “regime” concept invites moving beyond considering the statistical and numerical evidence of unequal experiences of women and men, to also acknowledge and address the underlying and multiple power relations that can be found in societies and institutions, including the media sector, and the relevance of policy formulation and adoption therein. In fact, adopting a *media gender equality regimes* approach offers a threefold opportunity.

First, gender inequalities in the media persist in areas of representation and recognition, access and inclusion, working conditions and decision-making, education

13. Gender analysis understands gender as socially constructed relations, and addresses the challenges of unequal gender structures and norms, while questioning systemic causes of unequal power relations between women and men, also incorporating a multidimensional character of gender (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017).

14. It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to address this definitional issue in depth. Further reflections can be found in Padovani (2018). Suffice here to say that the proposed definition includes different elements that are deemed important to deal with a concept that is widely used, value-laden but seldom problematized in its potential for politicizing inequality issues across the media and related policies. These elements are: a broad understanding of ‘media’; a multi-actor perspective to indicate the plurality of spheres and responsibilities involved in fostering gender equality; a recognition of the dual nature of the concept, that is/can be used in descriptive as well as prescriptive terms; the multi-dimensional nature of gender inequalities as they are reproduced across the media; the need to ultimately address structural unequal power relations, thus adopting a transformative perspective.

and violence, but they are rarely investigated, nor addressed, in their intersection (Djerf-Pierre, 2011). A *media gender equality regimes* approach allows focusing not on single, specific forms of inequality, but on the interplay and intersection of multiple forms of privilege and disadvantage (Connell, 2009). In this sense, future investigations engaging with the potential of digital technologies to overcome or/and reproduce gender inequalities could consider the impact and implication of the digital on multiple dimensions of (in)equality.

Second, as regimes are bound together by “implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge ...” (Krasner, 1982), the centrality of regulatory elements in *media gender equality regimes* becomes evident. In this perspective, the ideation, design, development, adoption and implementation of governing arrangements for the media – from public policies, to formal provisions and programs adopted at the level of individual media companies – should be assessed in terms of their gender-responsiveness; consistently with the Beijing Plan for Action.

Third, *media gender equality regimes* should be operationalized and empirically explored, at any one level of media policy identified above. The practices and processes that reproduce gender disparities in the media sector can be investigated at the supranational as well as at the national level, as well as the principles and norms, and regulatory arrangements adopted by media organizations, national parliaments, transnational networks responsible for defining normative frameworks for the media, traditional and digital.

As we search for new ground to enrich and innovate a long tradition of scholarly work, *media gender equality regimes* may provide a useful analytical tool towards a next generation of policy-aware media gender in-/equality studies.

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Invisible children

Inequalities in the provision of screen content for children

Jeanette Steemers

Focusing on industry responses and structures, this chapter looks at how inequalities occur in the provision of screen content for children. Part one, drawing on McQuail's (in this volume) discussion of the different strands within media equality research (consolidated ownership; media flows; representation), asks where and how inequalities have arisen in children's screen content in Europe, and what the implications are. The second part considers what type of interventions, either positive or negative, have been used to tackle apparent inequalities in provision, and with what effect in terms of benefits (that may not always be easy to specify or quantify). In light of the shift from national policy landscapes that have concentrated on children's broadcast television to other children's screen content, distributed on-demand and online, the chapter concludes with thoughts about what type of policy is needed to address inequalities in the provision of screen content in an age of digital communication.

Shifts in the distribution of screen content, from broadcasting to on-demand online services, are clearly impacting the production and consumption of television-like services across Europe. These shifts are particularly resonant for children's screen content where we are seeing distribution across a proliferation of platforms, targeting both global and local markets (Potter & Steemers, 2017). In this respect, the children's audio visual market provides preliminary insights about future developments generally, drawing attention to both the risks as well as the opportunities of technological change.

At face value, children around the world have never before had so many viewing choices, including more than 400 dedicated children's channels (Westcott and Stuart, 2015), new subscription video-on-demand services (SVOD) such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, and the ubiquity of Youtube and its free children's app Youtube Kids, in some territories. In 2017, UK children between 5 and 15 years of age watched about 14-15 hours of TV a week on a TV set, but growing numbers are watching even more on-demand on other devices (phones and tablets), mostly Youtube (Ofcom, 2017a,

Section 1). Nevertheless, in spite of swathes of free content and numerous paid-for options, the children's market still exhibits many pre-existing and emerging challenges that reinforce concerns around economic, social or political inequalities.

Elsewhere in this volume, the late Denis McQuail draws our attention to the slipperiness of defining inequality, equality and related concepts such as access and freedom – concepts which are often contradictory, if one part of society's quest for equality (adults) impedes the freedom of another section of society (children) (McQuail, this volume). These are relative terms, after all, defined by the different contexts of changing political, economic and social landscapes, that defy a one-size fits all definition. Yet there is a case for arguing that, within the children's screen content industries, there are a slew of existing and emerging inequalities that are reinforced by both traditional (largely national) and evolving (largely transnational) industry models, that nationally-oriented policy and regulatory systems seem ill-equipped to tackle.

The overarching question for this volume centres on the ways and the extent to which media and communications in different European countries contribute to or even reduce social inequalities. This is a pertinent question to ask in relation to screen content for children, as children's status as minors means they have little or no input into the policies, regulations and media that are made for them. So, their voices and experiences are rarely considered in debates that tend to focus on adult preoccupations about protection rather than provision of content or active participation, a situation that has not improved with the Internet (Pugh, 2014).

A subordinate question of this volume asks what role digital technologies play in the process of creating or reducing social inequalities. Again, the question is valid for children's screen content as new forms of digital distribution are often presented as liberating for children, allowing them the freedom and agency to produce and post their own video content without adult intervention. Yet, this ignores strong evidence to the contrary, because not all children are "digital natives" or necessarily competent about creating their own digital content (Wilson & Grant, 2017), as opposed to accessing and viewing it on Youtube.

A final sub-question of this volume asks to what extent social and economic inequalities lead to digital inequalities. Again, this is germane to children, because some children may not have access to subscription video services or even online access, for a variety of reasons including caregiver choice, lack of financial resources or simply lack of access where they live. However, industry narratives at forums like the last Children's Global Media Summit in Manchester in 2017, tend to foreground universal access to technologies, that herald a "digital future ... without limits or end, an unlimited resource with unlimited possibilities for an unlimited generation";¹ taking little account of children in emerging economies or children with more complex needs (see Alper & Goggin, 2017).

Yet children, as a sector of the population, have always experienced media and communications inequalities shaped by adult understandings of their immaturity

1. <http://cgms17.com/>

and apparent lack of agency. These inequalities sit alongside other inequalities that may stem from their ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, inequalities that take on new dimensions with digital media. Adult concerns have long become manifest on the one hand in “moral panics and knee-jerk regulation” (Bulger et al., 2017: 752) in response to the perceived risks to children from media; risks that may be overstated and through which adults seek to take control of children’s lives (See Drotner, 1999). Or children’s communications needs may be subordinated to adult concerns about safeguarding adult rights to communicate, curtailing children’s participation rights as agents or citizens, and burdening children and young people with “excessive responsibility” to protect themselves and their peers, and to behave better than adults under the banner of “digital citizenship” (Livingstone & Third, 2017: 661). This has become a key part of the agenda around digital rights and children, which extends beyond screen content to embrace social media and other forms of digital engagement. For example, the European Union’s 2016 General Data Protection Regulation requires those under sixteen to get parental consent to access social network and gaming sites.

Children’s place within discussions about rights and equality is further complicated by how childhood is defined in terms of age. The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as anyone under the age of eighteen (UN, 1989). This is a fluid category where industry responsibility for older children is rarely recognised in the same way as responsibilities for younger children (see House of Lords, 2017: §298). For example, most European public service broadcasters are required to serve children, but many of them have ceased to cater specifically for children over the age of twelve because it is not deemed economic to do so. Social media, including Youtube, who barely regulate video content targeted at children at all, prohibit children from accessing their sites before the age of thirteen, but this is difficult to verify or regulate. At the same time the tech industry, according to one recent report, is resistant “to providing services which incorporate the support and respect for rights that would enable a better internet experience for all children as they explore the wider internet”. (House of Lords, 2017: §298).

Inequalities also arise from industry resourcing of children’s content and services. In terms of practical and positive interventions, children’s population share has rarely been matched by equivalent production expenditure and resources. For example, children under fifteen represent 17.8 per cent of the UK’s population, but UK public service broadcasters spent just under three percent of their first-run UK originated programme spend on children’s content in 2016 (Ofcom, 2017b: 23). This disparity in resourcing is replicated throughout Europe, where children under fifteen made up 15.6 per cent of the EU’s population in 2016 (Eurostat statistics explained, 2017). In spite of the significant proportion of children living within the EU, their media and communications needs are fairly marginal and subordinate to the policy priorities of national governments, the interests of corporate profit targets, and adult audiences. Children do not vote and therefore do not have to be courted as stakeholders by

politicians. For media businesses, children's limited economic power is rarely worth chasing unless they function as a lure for parental expenditure. For advertising-funded broadcasters, children have become an even less attractive audience after wholesale bans on advertising targeting children (as in Scandinavia) or bans on advertising food and drink high in sugar, fat and salt during children's broadcasts (see ITV, 2018). No such restrictions exist in the online world (House of Lords, 2017).

Focusing on industry responses and structures, this chapter looks at how inequalities occur in the provision of screen content for children. Part one, drawing on McQuail's (2018) discussion of the different strands within media equality research (consolidated ownership; media flows; representation), asks where and how inequalities have arisen in children's screen content in Europe, and what the implications are. The second part considers what type of interventions, either positive or negative, have been used to tackle apparent inequalities in provision, and with what effect in terms of benefits (that may not always be easy to specify or quantify). The gradual shift from national policy landscapes, that have concentrated on children's television programming for a broadcast audience, to other forms of children's screen content that are distributed on-demand and online but with far fewer regulatory interventions, are of particular importance throughout the chapter. The chapter concludes with thoughts about what type of policy is needed to address inequalities in the provision of screen content in an age of digital communication.

Media equality issues in children's screen content

Consolidated ownership

Research about equality is often concerned with the consequences of concentrated, or even monopoly ownership structures. In the case of mass media broadcasting and the press, this resulted in fears that powerful ownership interests would not only have an undue influence on content, but also on public opinion (Herman & McChesney, 2001). However, as many, including McQuail in this volume, have pointed out, evidence of influence on public opinion has been difficult to prove. Nevertheless, these concerns are being replicated in debates about "fake news" online and the extent to which platforms like Google and Facebook have responsibilities to society, and indeed children. In a recent response to concerns about inappropriate children's video content featuring favourite children's cartoon characters (Bridle, 2017), Youtube culled several popular channels targeted at children, removed advertising from unsuitable content aimed at families, and announced that it would be strengthening its guidelines for children's content, and be employing more moderators to ensure that animated content for adult audiences did not end up being viewed by children (Youtube, 2017). However, there are limits to these interventions, because Youtube continues to see itself as a technology provider rather than a content provider, and there is little to stop children watching Youtube.com over the children's app Youtube Kids.

Historically, the children's television industry has been heavily globalised through distribution, but by content providers who ensured that these channels were safe spaces for children. Global channels are dominated by three large US corporations: Disney, Viacom (through Nickelodeon) and Time Warner (through Cartoon Network). Building on their success in the US, these companies were able to grow businesses on the back of animation series and children's sitcoms that had already succeeded financially in the US market. It was simply cheaper for many overseas broadcasters to buy ready-made US or Japanese cartoons to fill their schedules, than investing in original content for small child audiences that are highly differentiated by age (pre-schoolers, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14) (See Sakr & Steemers, 2017 for the Arab situation). Later, with the advent of cable and satellite broadcasting in the 1990s, the big three simply extended their businesses by offering localised versions of their US channel offerings. These channels repeated and repurposed the animation and sitcoms that had already been produced for North American children (D'Arma & Steemers, 2012; Lustyik & Zanker, 2013). As children's content became more focused on dedicated channels, many free-to-air European general commercial broadcasters simply stopped including regular children's slots in their schedules (e.g. ITV in the UK, TV2 in Denmark) because catering for children was not deemed sufficiently profitable (Steemers & Awan, 2016).

The entry of powerful new online players such as Youtube, Netflix and Amazon Prime into the children's video market, promises further disruption. As subscriber services, the last two are beginning to make an impact on children's content, commissioning some new content and clearly targeting international child audiences to attract adult subscribers (Potter, 2017). However, it is freely-available Google-owned Youtube, and its associated app Youtube Kids, which are most popular, affording children more opportunities to access and post content online, generating millions of views. In the UK in 2017, older children aged 12-15 were more concerned about losing access to Youtube (48%) over Netflix (19%) and the BBC (6%) (Ofcom 2017a: 81). However, Youtube is not subject to the same regulations as broadcasting on matters like advertising and inappropriate content. This has raised concerns about offence and harm as well as consolidated power in the marketplace. Concerns around consolidation have also focused on the close relations with toy manufacturers (Hasbro, Mattel, Lego), as advertising and marketing blurs with editorial content. This is a practice that has become prevalent on Youtube through vlogging and unboxing videos, often hosted by children, who open toys and confectionary products on screen (See Craig & Cunningham, 2017).

Consolidated ownership in the digital sphere, involving the likes of Google and Facebook, raises serious questions about the commodification of both child and adult users through greater "datafication and dataveillance" – in spite of the benefits for children of online participation (Lupton & Williamson, 2017). The application of algorithms by platforms, ostensibly to optimise children's choices for example in recommendations for screen content, can serve to limit children's choices to a narrow range of mainstream pre-set options (Livingstone & Third, 2017). This benefits

corporate rather than children's interests, with little transparency and accountability about how those algorithms work (Livingstone & Local, 2016).

Flows of children's media

Closely linked to concerns about consolidation in the digital sphere, are anxieties about where children's content is being sourced. A great deal of children's screen content has traditionally been developed for US audiences because this is the most lucrative market. So, the flow of children's content to other markets is, according to McQuail (this volume: 33), "essentially second hand" surplus that can be "sold off" below the cost of production. Japan is another major source of animation.

To children's advocacy groups and policy stakeholders, this appears to generate inequalities: Children rarely get to see their own culture represented on screen, although online provision of screen content is blurring these distinctions and laying bare poor provision for older children by European broadcasters. Earlier research indicated that 70-90 per cent of children's content in Europe on the localised TV channel offerings of Disney, Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network was US material (D'Arma & Steemers, 2012). When asked in 2017 about the TV programmes they watched, over a third of UK children aged 8-14 said there are not enough TV programmes that show children that look like them. 41 per cent of 12-15 year olds thought there are not enough programmes that show children that live in their locality, compared to 45 per cent that do (Ofcom, 2017a: 97). However, for older UK children (12-15), who go online and have little content directed at them by broadcasters, Youtube is considered to be best at showing people that live in their locality (36%) or showing people that look like them (31%), suggesting that Youtube is better at reflecting their lives (Ofcom, 2017a: 95), e.g. with short-form music and prank videos. Within Europe, it is primarily European public service broadcasters, many of whom are struggling both financially and politically, who are commissioning limited amounts of home-grown children's content.

Ideological concerns about consolidation, the dominance of US interests and inequalities of representation within children's content are of course certainly not new (see Dorfman & Mattelart, 1984). Doubts about US-owned enterprises and content have never receded, but a more nuanced view might be to consider inclusion and whether children ever "see themselves reflected in the media" in respect of "race, ethnicity, class, religion, disability, geography, age", particularly in situations where limited representations could promote "a limited and discriminatory world view among children", impacting how they see themselves and others (Unicef, 2011: 11-12). However, like the impact of concentrated ownership on public opinion, it is difficult to empirically evidence the beneficial impact of children seeing themselves on screen (Buckingham, 2009). This is in part due to a lack of research, but also reflects the growing difficulties of researching platforms and devices where data is proprietary and closed for further examination (Livingstone & Local, 2017).

Whether such one-sided flows amount to “cultural imperialism” in children’s content is a moot point because it is difficult to gauge what the effects of just watching US or other non-domestic content might be. Yet, concerns about asymmetric flows go to the heart of the right of smaller territories and distinctive regions “to maintain their language and culture” (McQuail, this volume: 33). Within Europe, extra support for children’s services in minority languages is evident in Wales (S4C), Scotland (BBC Alba), Flanders (Ketnet) and Ireland (TG4). Yet, same languages are also an issue (Lowe & Nissen, 2011): German-language channels, based in Germany, for example, have arguably undermined smaller German-speaking markets, such as Switzerland. In Switzerland, German-speaking public broadcaster, SRG, has largely dispensed with German language broadcast TV services for children because it cannot compete with services based in Germany, either in producing its own material or in acquiring rights, purchased for the German-language region. In this case it is not just about volumes of content. It also concerns programme range in an international marketplace, dominated by cheap and easily repeated animation series, that contribute to *industry lore* that suggests that only certain types of children’s content appeal to children (see Havens, 2010).

Representation – “Children need to see themselves”

Equality is also linked to representation and the capacity of minorities to influence how they are represented, either through access to their own media sources and outlets, or through employment within those organisations that commission, produce and distribute media content (See McQuail, in this volume). For children, as a minority within the population, this means seeing themselves on screen, but also rests on assumptions that content produced by adults should be child-centred and that adults should work *with* children rather than simply for them (Unicef, 2011; Steemers, Sakr & Singer, 2017: 19). Here, equality involves children having access to diverse screen portrayals that reflect ethnicity, gender, class and locality, that are not stereotypical (Goetz & Lemish, 2011).

However, within Europe, there is only limited screen content that depicts children from ethnic minorities. The vast majority of these are commissioned by better-funded public service broadcasters in a small number of countries including the UK (BBC), Germany, Scandinavia and the Netherlands. For example, the recent arrival of Arab children in Europe as a result of forced migration has been covered by German and Scandinavian public broadcasters as a response to changing demographics (Steemers et al., 2017). However, few of these commissions are in popular drama or animation formats as opposed to factual shows, a genre that struggles to get funding or distribution within a more commercialised children’s screen environment, where children are viewing less scheduled output (*ibid.*).

The availability of children’s content online does little to dispel concerns about representation on the digital realm, because there is no regulation to achieve this. There are indications that some content providers in the online world of multi-channel

networks (MCNs) do not always adhere to the standards of ethics and diversity that prevail within European broadcasting (Bridle, 2017). There is even disturbing evidence of racism by digital companies that distribute children's content on Youtube. According to some reports, this is evident in "a general white-washing of entertainment", with minimal representation of ethnic minorities, and the avoidance of non-white hands in "unboxing" or "how to tutorials" (Steemers et al., 2017: 18).

Interventions for equality for children

Although equality plays only a minimal role in industrial policy, it has been important in tackling anomalies in the children's marketplace; widely recognised as a market failure genre (Steemers, 2017). Interventions are usually driven by an acknowledgement that children are a "vulnerable" section of the audience, and that children deserve access to content that will help them develop as citizens. In broadcasting, this acknowledgement has been reflected in negative interventions to protect children from harm (e.g. restrictions on advertising, screen violence) and positive approaches that seek to promote children's content (e.g. through production and transmission quotas, or policies that seek to promote diversity in respect of ethnicity, locality etcetera).

These interventions connect with children's media rights, outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), and ensure that nation states heed those rights, which facilitate children's participation in public communication and provide them with the entitlements they need for citizenship, such as the right to free speech. As a normative baseline for children's rights, the UNCRC recognises children's agency (the right to inform themselves and be heard). It does not however address the diverse contexts of children and childhood, shaped by disparities in culture, location, and the differentiated power of the state, family, and commercial organisations (Asthana, 2017).

Article 17 of the UNCRC gives children the right to access information from a variety of national and international sources, but with the proviso that adults should ensure that the information children receive is not harmful. Other UNCRC articles give children the right to express their opinion and be listened to (Article 12), the right to privacy (Article 16), and the right to find out information and share it, unless it harms or offends other people (Article 13). There are then significant caveats (e.g. the protection of national security or public order or morals), and issues of enforceability.

These rights give children some equality with adults to form and express their ideas from widely available information sources, and are reinforced by children's right to education (Articles 28 and 29). Yet, equality is not guaranteed, because there are important restrictions and tensions linked to perceptions of children's maturity and vulnerability. In practice, concerns about protection (negative interventions) have always taken priority over positive interventions that seek to empower children and allow them to participate and take full advantage of their rights (Macenaite, 2017). Regardless of these contradictions, the Convention does recognise children as rights

holders to whom the nation state has a responsibility for creating legal and policy frameworks which allow these rights to be implemented (Bulger et al., 2017).

However, digital and online media present new challenges for policy-makers. Previous approaches that concentrated on broadcast media, and children's television in particular, can no longer be dealt with separately from the other types of online services and content that are now available to children. Although interventions themselves do not guarantee equality of provision and participation, policy-makers have intervened at different levels to secure screen content for children in the past. As screen content for children becomes less of a broadcast appointment to view, and more of an opportunity for online engagement, national policy initiatives, shaped by cultural and regional priorities, are proving much less effective in dealing with potential emerging inequalities.

Public service broadcasting

Traditionally, Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) has been the most important intervention for children's screen content in Europe. The PSB principle of universality (appealing to different sections of the child audience) has supported the notion of a mixed diet of genres and formats that counters inequalities in representation. Yet, this notion is under threat from reduced funding for European PSBs, stagnant or declining advertising revenues for commercial channels, and the rise of online on-demand providers.

In most European countries, PSBs are required to serve children. However, they have an uneven ability to produce and distribute children's content. The ability to sustain domestic production of children's screen content depends on: (1) the size of national markets (2) the availability of funding and talent (3) regulatory structures that support children's content. There are sharp divisions between for example the UK, Germany, the Nordics, and Benelux, where comparatively well-funded PSBs are adapting to children's changing consumption of screen media, and countries where PSB enjoys less political and financial backing, and are unable to provide a diverse range of content that either meets local demands or competes effectively with commercial media online, namely in southern, central and eastern Europe (D'Arma & Labio, 2017). As children's screen content develops, new approaches are necessary, but not all PSBs are in a position to respond. This has knock-on effects for domestic producers, who have access to few alternative commissioners.

Alternative funding mechanisms

Having identified funding as a major source of inequality in the provision of children's screen content, some countries have pursued policies that set aside additional funding

to help subsidise home-grown production (Steemers & Awan, 2016). France applies broadcaster levies and tax breaks to support animation. Denmark and Ireland operate competitive contestable funds, financed from funds designated for public service broadcasting, that support children's content alongside other threatened genres. This route is also being pursued by the UK since the British Film Institute was given the task of administering a separate contestable fund for public service content in December 2017. However, there is little agreement on whether the outcomes of contestable funding are beneficial for children's content, or simply redistributing existing funding (Pact, 2018)

Approaches to the funding of children's production remain resolutely national even in the face of globalization. Disparate regulatory structures and support mechanisms (subsidies, quotas, training) are also predominantly nationally orientated (with limited financial support from the EU), while the main challenge comes from transnational operators who agglomerate audiences across borders.

Quotas

Some European countries have applied quotas to promote domestic production or particular types of content. France has used quotas across all channels to support domestic animation. In the UK, quotas on children's content for commercial PSBs were removed in the 2003 Broadcasting Act. Under an amendment to the 2017 Digital Economy Bill, UK regulator Ofcom can re-impose quotas on commercial PSBs if it detects a lack of range and diversity. Ofcom has however declined to do so because it does not believe this would be an "effective approach" given "the changing viewing habits of young audiences" (Ofcom, 2018: 4).

However, quotas on broadcasters do nothing to tackle the greater challenge of online distribution and the shift by children to online platforms. Nor can quotas achieve a more equal representation of different sections of society. Regulation beyond "restrictions on forms of discrimination that are illegal or clearly harmful for the public as a whole" (McQuail, in this volume) is difficult to apply and industry dislikes regulation that might limit flexibility. Beyond quotas (for example on amounts of content produced), there has to be some reliance on the media themselves to commit to more equal representation and tackle issues related to gender and ethnic minorities.

Stakeholders, such as children's advocacy bodies and parental campaigns, can exercise some influence (Steemers, 2018). Yet, success in securing representative content for children also involves a struggle with financial and political realities that are difficult to overcome. First and foremost, commercial companies do not want to invest in children's content unless they can see clear profits that are more likely to be generated by a more limited range of content.

Rights-based approaches

In terms of policy approaches, it is increasingly difficult to regulate screen content on broadcast television separately from content and services available to children online (Livingstone & Local, 2016). This convergence raises issues of competing rights of children, highlighting the tensions between the adult wish to protect children from potential harm, and the wish to provide content for children with the aim of allowing them to participate and benefit from online engagement in their own right (Bulger et al., 2017; Macenaite, 2017: 767). Greater equality for children that contributes to their empowerment and participation as individuals, sits alongside concerns connected with data protection, privacy, commercial exploitation and the distribution of harmful images and videos (Livingstone & Third, 2017). These considerations also affect adults, but in the case of children the controversies are often caused by adult exploitation or adult failure to take children into account.

However, society's desire to protect children can prove inhibitive to children's rights of expression and participation, requiring a careful balance between the opportunities and benefits afforded to children by online participation, and concerns about risks and safety that require protection. Rights-based approaches to children's media engagement seek to achieve this balance, taking account of the competing interests of children and adults in the digital realm. According to Livingstone and Third (2017), instead of thinking about children's rights in exceptionalist terms (as a special case), which limits their ability to participate, there are opportunities to open up a space for diverse representations and the exercise of communicative rights that contribute to children's selfhood and identity (Lupton & Williamson, 2017: 786) rather than "a single normative voice" (Livingstone & Third, 2017: 661). This means paying more attention to the provision and participation aspects of children's rights and giving children space to exercise their voice in society as living rights, rather than focusing on a normative universal rights discourse defined by international bodies and institutions (Asthana, 2017). Without this space, children may have "few opportunities to challenge the inferences and predictions that are made by algorithmic calculations" that may come to determine their life chances (Lupton & Williamson, 2017: 786).

Conclusion

Children's access to screen content represents only one part of their developing engagement with digital media. Nonetheless, their consumption of screen content represents a substantial part of their media activities across a variety of devices. In terms of policy approaches to screen content, there are strong arguments to protect children from harm. This has to be done in ways that do not limit children's rights to access content and inform themselves from a variety of national and international sources.

There are equally strong arguments for policy measures that create a financial and structural basis for the provision of screen content that fairly represents the diversity of the societies in which children find themselves. Such provision requires adequate financial resourcing that takes account of growing public concern about advertising and the use of children's data to target advertising, as well as concerns about the inequalities of subscription funding (e.g. Netflix, Amazon). This suggests that publicly funded content will continue to play a role, particularly for younger children.

Policy, regulatory and practical interventions also need to move away from top-down professional practices that focus on making content for children as opposed to with them, and enhance children's participation and engagement through consultation and co-creation alongside children's own creative efforts. A clearer focus on children's participation and agency can also provide the basis for children's later participation as citizens in society. This requires new approaches to children's media that take account of the varied ways in which children find and consume screen content, but also rein in the industry's reliance on technological justification for online services, which take little account of children's rights from the outset.

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Chapter 12

New forms of the digital divide

Elena Vartanova & Anna Gladkova

The article discusses the inequalities that emerged in parallel with, and as a result of, the rise of digital media across the world. The analysis of theoretical approaches to the digital divide in both global and national contexts proves that digital inequality is a multi-faceted issue that has been developing over the course of time and is noticeably affected by the changing realities of digital media today. The article broadens the discussion by adding the issue of multi-ethnicity to the theoretical context, looking at the digital divide in a national context, in this case Russia. The paper focuses on the empirical dimensions of digital inequality on a country-wide level, analysing the issue of the digital divide as both a theoretical and a practical phenomenon. Consequently, possible ways to overcome and to prevent the digital divide are discussed, with a focus on media policy and digital engagement through media literacy playing a crucial role in this process.

Contemporary society has considerably increased its dependence on information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital media, which are gradually shaping modern social and individual life. The process of digitalization has influenced almost all social practices and individual experiences. Politicians and academics have widely discussed how digital technologies could contribute to the digital economy, democracy and empowerment (Castells, 1996, 2009; Dahlberg, 2015; Norris, 2001). However, in parallel with a belief in the advantages of digitalization, there traditionally exists a critical approach to the progress of digital media that draws attention to controversial issues of digital realities, such as information security in business and the media, public and private domains, network surveillance, information abundance, the rise of digital consumption and so on (Athique, 2013; Lindgren, 2017).

Describing future society as “information”, “knowledge”, “networked”, “network” or “digital” (Castells, 2001; De Prato et al., 2014; Webster, 2006), scholars have relied on the perception that the future will be shaped by digital economy, democracy and culture under the strong influence of information and communication technologies (ICTs). At the same time, scholars have also pointed to the growing digital gaps

between and within regions, countries, nations and individuals – also the result of digitalization.

The continuing and even deepening social injustice, reflected in a high number of global, social and individual forms of inequality in a digital society, has become one of the most widely debated problems in media and communication studies (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013; van Dijk, 2005). The digital divide itself has often been considered as a global problem of unequal access to and unequal use of digital technologies, with special attention paid to the benefits of using digital technologies and the disadvantages of not doing so (Fuchs & Novak, 2008; Park, 2017).

A theoretical understanding of digital inequality as a multidimensional and complex phenomenon could hardly cover all the possible empirical representations of it, from basic technological access to the digital competences of social institutions and individuals (Park, 2017). The development of academic views on the digital divide can thus be described as a continuum of related issues, starting with unequal access to digital technologies, a lack of resources and skills and low motivation to use the technologies and extending to a lack of opportunities to use new digital tools and platforms for social purposes (Lindgren, 2017). In academic studies, the digital divide has often been considered as a new and multifaceted type of social inequality.

Theorizing the digital divide

The study of the digital divide as a new form of social exclusion recently became an emerging and popular area of media and ICT studies. According to meta-research on academic articles regarding the digital divide conducted by a Canadian scholar, Bhanu Bhakta Acharya, the number of such publications had reached more than 14,000 by the end of the twentieth century (Acharya, 2017: 46). The interest increased in the 2000s, and two main groups of academic studies with a clear sociological focus can now be identified. The first one analyses the qualitative growth of ICTs and emphasizes emerging digital gaps from a vertical perspective; the second one adopts a horizontal perspective, paying attention to national and global inequalities (*ibid.*: 47).

The study of the digital divide is rooted in early predictions of social inequality in the information society. Initially, information poverty, measured through uneven access to ICTs and the network infrastructure, drew attention from scholars worldwide (Compaine, 2001). In fact, uneven access to technological networks and infrastructure, resulting in unequal access to the information and online services that they distribute, shaped the first period of the digital divide studies (van Dijk, 2013). Obviously, the first stage of the digital divide research was marked by a clear political economy approach. For instance, Pippa Norris (2001: 13) referred to ICTs as “a Pandora’s box unleashing new inequalities of power and wealth, reinforcing deeper divisions between information rich and poor, the tuned-in and the tuned-out, the activists and disengaged”.

Over the course of time, the digital divide became understood not merely as an access problem but as a complex multidisciplinary phenomenon closely affiliated with the political, economic and cultural development of a society. Scholars underlined that, given the multiple aspects of society's life to consider, "there is more than one digital divide" and stressed that the view of the digital divide as a binary distinction between haves and have-nots is not appropriate (Compaine, 2001: 25). Scholars understood the complexity of the issue and argued that "digital inequality should not be only the preserve of specialists but should make its way into the work of social scientists concerned with a broad range of outcomes connected to life chances and life trajectories" (Robinson et al., 2015: 570). The digital divide has attracted the attention of scholars from various research fields, including sociology, political and economy studies, anthropology and so on (Compaine, 2001).

Thus, the second wave of the digital divide studies put forward a more nuanced, up-to-date approach, looking at the problem as a multidimensional issue, embracing different aspects of the divide and exclusions and approving the applicability of conceptual dimensions – from political economy to lifestyle studies (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). Scholars drew attention to the digital equality in general as well as to the inclusion problem as a precondition for the future development of the society, communities and individuals (Castells, 1996). The problem originated in the traditional political economy's concern about users' access to new recourses of the digital society; computers, telecommunication networks and information as well as content distributed via these networks. Later on, it developed into a broad, multifaceted field of study, which implied various dimensions that may be examined only through a multidisciplinary approach.

It is worth noting that unequal access to digital technologies and media, as well as an early understanding of digital inequality, promoted the concept of "digital inclusion" as an alternative to the digital divide as digital exclusion. At the beginning, it already became clear that policies seeking to bridge the existing digital inequalities should be targeted at building digital inclusion – in technological, economic and usage forms. At the same time, it was clear that the technological gaps were to a large extent determined "by the societal and cultural norms of the existing society, and there has been a long historical trajectory of how the human race has embraced and advanced technologies over the time" (Park, 2017: 6).

Thus, the second stage in the study of digital inequality focused on its impact on the social life of modern society, using methodologies and instruments from different research fields and traditions. It emphasized correlations between information in general, access to ICTs as well as the digital infrastructure and the economic benefits that such access can provide for the society and individuals. This approach was based on the idea of a complex nature of the digital divide and its consequences for the society.

The increasing penetration and usage of the internet worldwide, in parallel with the rise in the production of professional and user-generated digital content and the evolution of technical platforms, resulted in the new processes of social development

based on a new quality of ICTs and digital media (Flew, 2008). Media scholars paid more attention to the impact on media production than media consumption and highlighted that the digital revolution might change the principles of production and distribution of goods and services as well as the political public sphere and cultural milieu. As Castells argued, contemporary social and economic life has been significantly influenced by the digital infrastructure, in turn becoming a backbone for the e-economy, digital markets and finances, e-democracy and digital society (Castells, 2001).

Wessels elaborated the idea of Castells and stated: “For economies to be competitive in a global market, they need to be connected to the digital infrastructure and they require a labor force that has the education and skills to work in an e-economy” (Wessels, 2013: 21). Accordingly, new demands for human capital would progressively determine the requirements for education, media, social participation and cultural practices within evolving digital environments. This became a crucial point for later research, which tried to reconceptualize digital inequality and exclusion as a social problem. Such a problem needed to be solved on different levels and in different spheres, including the state/public sphere, business sphere and personal sphere, first and foremost when it came to developing the technological skills and personal awareness/motivation of users (Park, 2017). Many studies expected users’ behaviour and experiences to move into “digital worlds, which would define forms, content and even nature of communication” (Robins & Webster, 1999). Therefore, “as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, both economically and socially, technology adaptation remains one of the defining factors in human progress” (Poushter, 2016: 3). In fact, an advanced vision of digital inclusion as digital engagement presupposed substantial personal involvement in the process of making and implementing digital skills.

At this stage, the digital divide research shifted to an anthropological angle by analysing the role of social status, education, individual abilities and personal motivations in making digital engagement successful at the level of an individual (Park, 2017). In addition, increasing anxiety over the societal and cultural effects of some modern applications of digital ICT emerged. More specifically, there was a concern that the economic emphasis and increasing use of these technologies would widen the digital gaps, which, accompanied by the ongoing socioeconomic polarization, could sharpen social inequality across the globe (Nieminen, 2016; Sparks, 2013).

Together with the discussion about the effects of the digital divide on socioeconomic life, the issue of participation – both societal and individual – in the new digital environment became widely discussed in the academic community. This view was partially based on the idea that individuals’ digital engagements played key roles in a range of outcomes – from academic performance and labour market success to entrepreneurship and health services’ uptake. Those who function better in the digital realm and participate more fully in digitally mediated social life enjoy advantages over their digitally disadvantaged counterparts (Park, 2017). Clearly, the concept of digital inequality was understood as a multidimensional phenomenon of a complex social and

individual nature. Thus, problems of developing relevant theoretical approaches and subsequent policy measures became extremely important – especially in the context of increasing empirical research on the access to and use of ICTs at national and local levels worldwide (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013).

In the 2000s, several authors, including the Dutch scholar Jan van Dijk, proposed more nuanced and complex theoretical explanations of the empirical data. Van Dijk developed his approach to the relational view of equality, which he conceptualized as a resources and appropriation theory of diffusion, acceptance and adoption of new technologies (Van Dijk, 2005). As he claimed:

The following four are the core concepts of this theory: a number of personal and positional categorical inequalities in society; the distribution of resources relevant to this type of inequality; a number of kinds of access to ICTs; a number of fields of participation in the society. (Van Dijk, 2013: 32)

In addition to these four concepts, van Dijk suggested a fifth one, namely the state of affairs determining the type of inequality to be explained. Van Dijk concentrated on the core point of his approach – equality/inequality, thus making the debate on the digital divide socially focused. While examining the digital divide as a research object and as a social construct, he developed a dynamic model labelling different kinds of access – from motivation to physical and material access to digital skills and to usage (*ibid.*: 35). All of them affect the degree of participation in different fields of society: economic (jobs), social (contacts), political (voting), cultural (cyber-culture), spatial (mobile life) and institutional (citizen rights). Within this approach, scholars also analysed how ICTs perform a societal function through information and communication provision, allowing access to socially significant content considered to be part of, for example, nationhood construction (Nieminen, 2016: 21). Following van Dijk's idea about the importance of social participation, the complex approach to the dynamic interaction of “access and use” gained more significance.

The third stage in the digital divide research focused on new “divides” and their negative consequences for the society, mostly for smaller communities and individuals. This focus reflected an emerging vision among scholars and policy makers that the policies meant to prevent the digital divides based on increasing technological and economic access to infrastructure have not been equally successful and do not provide straightforward solutions to the problem (Park, 2017). It became clear that the digital divide was not a static phenomenon but one heavily influenced by changes taking place on both the national and the global level (uneven development of the internet connection in different regions, the growth of e-commerce and e-democracy, changing audience behaviour and consumption practices under the influence of non-linear digital services, the spread of digital content flows, etc.). The appearance of such new “divides” under different transformation factors led to the further elaboration of traditional and new concepts, such as:

- *Digital exclusion* as a barrier to active social participation and economic activities for information “have-nots” (Williams et al., 2016). This concept will be partially illustrated later, using the case of the multi-ethnic Russian society and the correlation between ethnicity and access there;
- *Digital delay*, as a form of the digital divide that may disappear as internet connectivity and experience normalize (Nguyen, 2012);
- *The participatory divide*, referring to digital participation and understood as the use of the internet to create and transmit digital political resources, specifically involving a lack of digital skills, which might have effects on the development of the national network society (Morales et al., 2016);
- *Internet overuse* or even pathological dependence on digital networks and services, which has an effect on the clarity of self as a result of growing digital engagement (Israelashvili et al., 2012).

Still, in the latest digital divide research, the political economy approach remains influential and the main groups within digital society – those who are not connected, those who are connected but do not use the internet efficiently and those who use it excessively – are viewed from the perspective of social stratification. However, the new and more complex digital environment, often described as digital ecosystems, poses more complicated questions regarding the ways in which digital spheres influence people’s opportunities and different uses of technologies may lead to further inequalities (Dimaggio et al., 2004).

Dahlberg agreed that the key problem of the digital divide was still digital inequality but stated that

... what is largely overlooked in this focus on the context of users is the contexts structuring digital media technologies, by which I mean the social, cultural, political and economic relations that structure digital media technologies and thereby shape their use. (Dahlberg, 2015: 271)

While this view is common for the political economy paradigm, Dahlberg specifically emphasizes the political and economic context of “social media platforms”. By platforms, the scholar understands “web applications in which users who accept certain ‘terms of service’ are able to enter a user-friendly computational environment that provides particular structured services and experiences” (Dahlberg: 272). Dahlberg underlines the issue of corporate dominance within social media ownership, which combines ownership of physical infrastructures and intellectual property. Paradoxically, though, corporate ownership has become a crucial characteristic of new personalized digital environments, which are almost totally defined by one “social media platform” instead of a diversity of internet content and services: “For an increasing number of users the internet is now synonymous with Facebook, and in fact many Facebook users do not even consider themselves internet users” (ibid.: 276).

Dahlberg proposes the following new levels of the digital divide: the control divide (control of usage through “terms of use”), the surveillance divide (by social media corporations), the exploitation divide (based on the advertising business model) and the visibility divide (representation of users’ voices in social media).

Though critical approaches to the nature of the digital divide characterize the present state of the research, scholarly approaches have been affected by the need for policy making advocating equality in different senses. On the one hand, there is a growing understanding of the narrowing technological gap, resulting from efforts by various political and business stakeholders involved in the realization of active state policies. Digital infrastructures, connectivity, economy and even literacy programmes have been developed, and users have gained new possibilities to benefit from digitalization (De Prato et al., 2014).

On the other hand, it is crucial to underline that digital inclusion is not interaction merely with ICTs but also with social institutions and other users. Park suggested the concept of digital capital as a result of users’ digital skills, literacy, engagement and readiness. Digital capital might be considered a new form of Bourdieu’s cultural capital: in the digital society, this concept brings together the social and the individual, embracing upbringing, education, indicators of social class, personal experience and motivation, and it is a consequence of a wide range of factors – technological and non-technological and economic and non-economic (Park, 2017). As users, individuals and people come to the core of the emerging research, the anthropological approach becomes rather relevant.

Mapping the digital divide

As we have already seen, empirical research has traditionally defined the digital divide as “a disparity between those who have easy access to computers and the internet and those who do not. Patterns of unequal access are often related to global inequalities and to individual factors such as income, age, and/or gender issues” (Chandler & Munday, 2011: 102). Although the central idea is access to technological equipment and telecommunication networks, some scholars analyze the problem in a broader sense, focusing also on the problem of use (Sparks, 2013).

The complexity of the problem has generated numerous definitions, which have emerged not only in academic and expert communities but also at the political decision-making level. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) pointed out that

the term “digital divide” refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographical areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their use of the internet for a wide variety of activities. (OECD, 2001)

Today, daily activities, social participation and the spare time of users call for new skills to use digital media technologies and to be digitally connected, which makes the problem of inclusion in societal life more and more significant (van Dijk, 2005). Bearing in mind the rapid progress of the internet, the digital economy, e-democracy and new digital media, especially social media, in the last two decades, it is essential to determine how important the problem of access really is.

Originally, the problem of access focused primarily on access to technologies. In today's digital environment, however, it has come to embrace other aspects as well, including economic, political and cultural dimensions in national and global contexts. Given that scholars today name "the recognition of inequality and social and political polarization as major threats to our liberal democracies" (Nieminen, 2017: 4) and put divide and inequality issues in a broader societal context, the access problem is becoming exceedingly important.

The nature of the term "digital divide", its transformation and its present understanding have been widely explored in media studies. Many studies have taken a starting point close to Williams's argument about "social shaping approaches to technology", focusing on the ways in which technology is embedded into social relations and shaped by social factors (Williams, 1973: 17). One might say that it is still not only people's wish to use ICT but more broadly the policy of a society and the readiness of social institutions and policies to prevent digital inequality by increasing the level of digital inclusion and digital participation. According to Wessels (2013: 18), "The utilization of technology within economic, political and socio-cultural processes of society shape inequality".

For the last two decades, the digital divide has been examined with regard to statistical data about the current inequalities and divisions within society (Norris, 2001). However, the problem's interpretation was closely connected to the widening penetration of ICTs at both national and global levels. Its origins might be traced back to the debate about the information society and the gaps within it, identifying "information haves" and "information have-nots" as access to computers and telecommunication networks result in a changing number of "information rich" and "information poor" citizens (Vartanova, 2002). Consequently, the development of the digital divide on the country level and worldwide has been measured by a number of indicators, such as sources of inequality in access (computers, network and services) and in usage (computers, network and services). At each stage, indicators of different natures have emphasized economic, technological, social and cultural gaps and focused on the relations to social and socio-cultural inequality generated by age, behavioural and value patterns, lifestyle differences and personal motivations. In the following, we will discuss some dimensions and manifestations of the digital divide in society that we consider to be worth mentioning in this context.

Access divide. When the concept of the digital divide started to develop in the 1980s, the central problem was unequal access of users to personal computers, at that time the only electronic device used for internet connection (Compaine, 2001). Some scholars

even argue that the term “digital divide” originated from research on computer ownership gaps in the US and was used to mark the first generational gap by introducing the concept of a “Net Generation” (Acharya, 2017). Scholarship has analysed various reasons for generation gaps, including demographic, economic and technological reasons, involving individual relations to material resources or equipment ownership or the overall wealth of countries.

Access to telecommunication networks as providers of online content and services was considered to be the key reason for digital inequality in the early 1990s. It was obviously of a technical nature, and possibilities to be online, connected and networked were a key condition for “information haves”. The broadening of internet penetration in primarily developed countries created better conditions for the “North” than for the “South” and for the “West” than for the “East” (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). As many scholars underlined, the first gaps within countries and between states at the global level represented the existing inequalities in access to traditional resources paralleled by the existing social and regional divisions (Compaine, 2001).

In the 1990s, the uneven development of countries and regions visible at the global level subsequently defined the levels of telecommunication and ICT progress as well as the gaps in access to the global infrastructure. The level of national technologic infrastructure and general wealth were considered to be major barriers to equality in ICTs’ use in different countries and regions. Subsequently, the less developed countries of the global “South” continued to be excluded from the emerging global information society and digital economy (Servaes & Carpentier, 2006).

On the other hand, in the more developed countries of the global “North”, the socio-economic status and background of users and their level of education, ethnicity, age and gender appeared to be decisive factors that were shaping the digital divide more and more noticeably. The access to digital devices and social networks increased the amount of social capital of a person, which in turn contributed to social connectivity, created new learning possibilities, increased career opportunities and, along with this, added to changes in the societal and political life quality of users (see Balčytienė & Juraitė, this volume).

Socio-demographic divide. In the late 1990s, scholars began to acknowledge the socio-economic status and background of users and their level of education, ethnicity, age and gender as fundamental factors that shape the digital divides in society. This happened due to the progress of technologies, in terms of both network penetration and the decrease in the prices of computers and telecommunication tariffs and the growing availability of services and online content. All these factors made access to the internet cheaper and more widespread, especially due to the creation and spread of mobile telephony as an alternative technology for online distribution.

However, the demographic gaps that attracted the attention of scholars in the 1990s-2000s reflected persisting discrepancies in economic wealth. Within countries, the digital divide demonstrated the existence of class-based differences among producers

of online content, such as bloggers, Facebook and Twitter users, raters of movies and chat room participants (Anthes, 2011).

In sum, the noticeable division lines in the emerging digital societies in regard to the access to and use of computers and the internet, clearly shaped by gender, race, ethnicity, age and education, in their turn reflected social injustices. Many recent sociological surveys and studies have shown that, despite the continuing growth of the availability of digital technologies and the reduction in their price, digital gaps remain between men and women, children, parents and grandparents as well as people with different levels of education (Colombo et al., 2015; McMurtrey et al., 2012).

Motivational divide. The present focus on individual motivation and level of competence represents a new stage in the analysis of the complex phenomenon. As van Dijk (2013: 35) underlines, “prior to physical access comes the wish to have a computer and to be connected to the internet”. This is a rather new approach to the complexities of the digital divide and access problem. According to many studies, there is a substantial number of people who might be called “want nots” in their attitude towards digital technology. In parallel with the diffusion of technology in society, consumers’

interest to computers and internet access have obviously grown, but still some people lack motivations regarding new media. German and US surveys identified major reasons for the refusal including: no need, no time, no desire, lack of money, lack of skills, and even rejection of the medium. (van Dijk, 2013: 36)

In this anthropological turn in the digital divide research, users’ motivation, skills and demands are at the centre of debates about the use or non-use of digital technologies. Recent data on their use among US citizens illustrates how motivation and its relation to digital skills and digital readiness are new challenges for internet usage: the majority of users – 60 per cent of the participants – stated that it was difficult for them to know whether the information that they found online was trustworthy (Rainie, 2016: 42). This anthropological focus definitely brings forward a more up-to-date focus on individual reasons in a situation in which the overall technical access to the digital infrastructure is permanently growing. In summarizing the reasons for not being online (which affects the digital divide), Rainie outlined a cluster of reasons, shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reasons not to be online among US citizens

Groups of reasons	Per cent
Relevance (not interested + waste of time + too busy + don’t need/want)	34
Usability (difficult + too old + don’t know how + worried about viruses, etc.)	32
Price (too expensive + don’t have a computer)	19
Lack of availability/access	7

Source: Rainie (2016: 38).

Moreover, the dynamics of the modern digital divide demonstrate a paradoxical spiral evolution, combining old and new factors related to digital inequality. The old factors are the ones traditionally focused on general access to ICTs, while the new ones relate both to more developed technological services that people can access and, which is also important, the personal characteristics of users (their sociodemographic profile, motivation, etc.). Among the newer reasons for not having broadband in US homes, Rainie identified the costs of subscription and computers (43% of respondents), motivational reasons, such as the use of mobiles instead of wired computers, dissatisfaction with services and so on (27%).¹

At the same time, regardless of the recent technological developments and policy measures, the present state of access to computers, the internet, and mobile technologies in many countries is still far from perfect. Recent statistics provided by the Pew Research Center illustrate some key aspects of the digital divide (see Table 2).

Table 2. The demographics of internet use by different groups in selected European countries (2015; in per cent)

	Total	Age		Education		Income	
		18-34	35+	Less education	More education	Lower income	Higher income
United Kingdom	88	98	85	82	98	82	98
Spain	87	100	82	81	97	80	95
Germany	85	99	80	74	92	73	95
France	75	98	66	65	95	61	87
Italy	72	100	65	68	95	56	87
Russia	72	97	60	-	-	51	81
Poland	69	98	56	28	78	56	81

Source: Poushter (2016: 11).

Table 2 demonstrates that, even in economically advanced countries – for example, the UK or Germany – gaps with regard to internet use between different age groups remain. A clear consequence of this generation gap is illustrated by the highest possible level of internet use by younger people – so called “digital natives”, or the “Millennial generation”: in Canada, Italy and Spain, all young people are online, and the number is extremely high in the US, Germany, the UK and Russia in comparison with the internet use of the older groups.

Other visible differences in internet use can be seen between more and less educated people and between users with different income levels. Some descriptive statistics show gaps between other socio-demographic groups as well. For instance, the digital divide on gender grounds is rather common in many states, and recent statistics indicate a

1. 30 per cent did not respond.

gender-based digital divide in smartphone ownership. It is the usual practice that men have wider access than women in many countries (Pousher, 2016: 13).

The focus of the following subsection is the correlation between ethnicity and the digital divide in a multi-ethnic society, such as Russia. We believe that providing all ethnic and other minor groups with access to ICTs might be a way to guarantee minorities equal opportunities to develop, reach their target audience and air their views and interests in public. Pluralism in cyberspace also supports the access of all citizens to a wide spectrum of cultural representations, values and opinions of diverse communities, thus broadening everyone's cultural horizons and encouraging people to approach things in different ways. A pluralistic online media environment is a fundamental contributor to a multicultural society in which the interests and cultural identities of all the members of society are equally respected and protected (Gladkova, 2015). Additionally, we should remind ourselves that diversity and equality are closely connected, although this connection, as McQuail points out, is twofold:

On the one hand, equality can be seen as the maximisation of diversity where all have the same rights of access and treatment, while on the other hand, diversity can be seen as requiring media access and content and reception to approximately mirror the actual diversity of society in respect of locality, ethnicity, preferences, etc. (see McQuail, this volume, chapter 2)

In every society, manifestations of the digital divide are influenced by a whole range of factors, including socioeconomic, political, cultural, linguistic, geographical and technological ones. Despite more or less universally accepted theoretical approaches to digital inequality and views on how it correlates with social inequality in general, every country represents a unique mixture of old and new forms of the digital divide based on the country's background, history and current situation. In this regard, Russia makes a good case to study emerging digital inequalities (first and foremost related to access), since the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual nature of Russia, its geopolitical position and the complexity of the historical heritage of the country constitute the unique character of the Russian society and culture (Vartanova, 2012). In sum, Russia is an illustrative example of social, cultural and technological complexity within Europe.

Mixing old and new: The case of Russia's multi-ethnic society

In the course of the post-Soviet transformations, the Russian media system has been influenced by a number of geopolitical and cultural factors that have defined the nationally specific Russian model of the digital divide. One factor is the diverse ethnic structure of the population, speaking more than 170 languages besides the official Russian and populating the largest territory in Europe, spreading over 11 time zones and unevenly connected by transportation and ICT infrastructures. This explains the

dominance of federal television channels transmitted via both terrestrial and satellite networks in the country's media system. According to the Russian census of 2010, there are over 190 ethnic groups in the territory of the Russian Federation (Delitsyn, 2006; Vartanova, 2012). The ethnic structure of the population also affects the media industry's functioning, especially in economically depressed regions with minority language media. From here on, our analysis focuses primarily on one of the many problems of the digital divide, namely multi-ethnicity, in the huge country of Russia.

Internet and digital media have become visible signs of change in post-Soviet Russia, first in the mid-1990s, when ICTs began to penetrate large industrial Russian cities in the European part of the territory, and later in the mid-2000s, when digital technologies became available to the majority of the urban population. The real breakthrough happened in the early 2010s as the number of internet connections exceeded half the Russian population and the average mobile telephony penetration was almost equal to the size of population (Deviatko, 2013: 120-127; Mediasistema Rossii, 2015).

In 2017, the monthly number of internet users in Russia (defined as those who go online at least once per month) was 81.8 million people or 70 per cent of the total population (2017).² In the recent decades, the internet has become the second main source of information for Russians after television: 41 per cent of Russians regularly check news websites to read the latest news, and 19 per cent use forums, blogs and social networks for that purpose.³ The audience's level of trust in the internet has grown in the past years: in 2017, 18 per cent of Russians stated that they trusted information found on news websites compared with 15 per cent in 2015 (*ibid.*).

In the 1990s, Russia faced all forms of digital divides. Starting from a very low level of access and almost zero penetration of the telecommunication infrastructure in 1991, the year of the dissolution of the USSR, the level of information and digital literacy of the general audience was very low. The major division lines were, like elsewhere, access to technologies, place of residence, gender, occupation, age and the growing convergence of these factors (Deviatko, 2013: 119-128).

The difference between federal districts of Russia in terms of internet access today is not dramatic but noticeable. In the summer of 2017, for example, the North-Western federal district demonstrated the highest number of monthly internet audience members (75%) among all the federal districts, while the Volga federal district showed the lowest (65%) (*ibid.*). In 2017, all the federal districts of Russia experienced growth in the numbers of internet users compared with 2016, by at least several per cent each (e.g. the Ural federal district experienced +1 per cent growth of the monthly internet audience in 2017 compared with 2016; the South federal district and the Siberian federal district gained 3 per cent; the Far Eastern federal district gained 7 per cent, etc.).⁴ In the 2000s, the inequality of the regions in terms of digital access has fell, and the social, age and gender balance among Russian internet users have improved

2. <http://fom.ru/SMI-i-internet/13783>

3. <http://fom.ru/SMI-i-internet/13323>

4. http://www.bizhit.ru/index/users_count/0-151

(Mediasistema Rossii, 2015). Nonetheless, the problem of digital inequality across the large territory of Russia remains quite urgent.

A survey conducted by the Russian Fund “Public Opinion” revealed⁵ that there are two main groups of Russians who do not use the internet: those who do not have access to it but wish to use it and those who do not wish to use it at all. According to the survey results, the first group comprises 10 per cent of the Russian population, and the other one 40 per cent. The first group (mostly women below the age of 44 with a low income) has been constantly reducing due to the expansion of the internet around the country, and the second one, which consists mainly of women above 55 years old with a low income, is rather stable. The majority of respondents belonging to the first group live in the countryside (42%); among the second group, this category accounts for 59 per cent.

Nevertheless, the Russian internet has grown as a core part of the Russian media system as a communication platform for Russians with different social and cultural backgrounds. Bearing in mind the immense ethno-cultural heterogeneity of Russian society and the uneven economic and technological conditions of the Russian territory, it is worth discussing the correlation between the ethnic, cultural and linguistic factors and the digital gap in the country. Paradoxically, this aspect has rarely been in the spotlight of researchers. Previous studies have rather focused on the correlation between age, income and gender factors and digital inequality (e.g. Delitsyn, 2006; Deviatko, 2013; Smirnova, 2009).

ICTs in Russian society could be viewed as important means to build a society in which diverse ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic groups have equal freedom of expression and access to information, possess equal digital skills and media literacy and are able to use this freedom in both offline and online communication with a high level of media pluralism and received diversity. Received diversity (Peruško, 2013: 207) is a more recent dimension of media pluralism that integrates the consideration of the media audience and its actual choices of media and their content in reflections on media policy. This type of diversity includes “the possibility of access to a diverse mix of media and media programs that can (or should) contribute to media literate active citizens”.

The spread of digital technologies in a population with a diverse ethnic and linguistic background becomes a challenge in terms of overcoming the gaps in the existing infrastructures and the emerging digital inequalities. Previous research (e.g. Gladkova et al., 2018; Magadeeva, 2017; Tishkov & Malahov, 2002) shows that many ethnic groups in Russia today have limited access to digital technologies and the internet or/and/or quite often lack the digital competences and skills necessary to use advanced technologies. Minorities that belong to ethnic groups residing outside their territories or that lack a specific territory within the Russian Federation face particular difficulties in ensuring access to electronic media in their own language (Protsyk & Harzl, 2013).

When analysing the Russian realities of the digital divide, one aspect in particular should be considered: the historically strong relations between the media and the

5. <http://runet.fom.ru/Proniknovenie-interneta/10249>

state. These relations had a complex and multilayer nature, embracing controversial motivations for political control and economic support, for representation of ethnic and linguistic diversity and for safeguarding shared social values and the cultural and religious traditions of Russian citizens. In this context, the instrumental role of the press in Imperial Russia can be mentioned. Furthermore, Soviet journalism theory had a clear normative character, stressing the social mission of the media to preserve unity in the ideologically driven and non-ethnically diverse society (Nordenstreng et al., 2002). The vision of mass media, both their nature and their role, in post-Soviet Russia was influenced by these theoretical approaches.

In the 1990s, research on post-Soviet media mostly evaluated the state–media relations from the critical perspective of press freedom. However, approaches within media economics and media policy emphasized the need to evaluate the complexity and diversity of the roles played by the state in Russian media. Economic and technological dimensions of the emerging Russian media policy as well as ethnic and cultural diversity issues have to be put in the broader social context of a national political culture, post-crisis economy and non-active civil society (Vartanova, 2012). This approach also explains the active role of the state in various fields of policy making, including national ethnic and media policies.

Traditionally, the policy-making process in Russia has been defined as “top-down” by legislators, giving much attention to smaller ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups and claiming the necessity to provide them with better access to the internet and media in their native language. Several fundamental documents, such as the Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993), the State national policy of the Russian Federation (1996), the federal laws “On languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation”⁶ and “On securing rights of small indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation”,⁷ the federal state programme “Strengthening of the unity of the Russian Nation and the ethno-cultural development of the peoples of Russia (2014-2020)”⁸ and the Strategy of national policy in Russian Federation up to 2025⁹ create a legal framework for the state protection of equality on ethnic, cultural and linguistic grounds. For example, the legal framework protects the rights of Russians to receive and distribute information in their native language and outlines several strategic initiatives aimed at protecting ethnic languages and cultures. The documents hence emphasize the important role of mass media in building intercultural dialogue and communication across nations and ethnicities and support the creation of new media outlets (print, audiovisual and online) in languages of Russian ethnic groups and in several languages (i.e. the Russian language plus the language of a particular ethnic group).

The official national policy might be analysed in the context of the “principle of universality” and the intention to promote the equality principle. For Russian officials, the idea of appealing to different sections of the audience (Steemers, this volume

6. http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_15524/

7. <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/901732262>

8. <http://government.ru/docs/22925/>

9. <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/36512>

chapter 11) might signal an understanding of the need for a more reflective and open diverse media environment in a multi-ethnic Russian society and the need to provide all ethnic groups with equal opportunities for development and self-representation.

However, the outcomes of legal regulation and official policies are always dependent on the resources available for their implementation. Most often there are gaps between the announced values and aims of policies and the final results. For instance, the Russian federal state national strategies aiming to support ethnic, cultural and linguistic equality in the Russian regions are implemented under the influence of multiple factors, including: a) macro-layer factors, such as the state of technological and economic development of the region, in turn including the level of broadband distribution and internet household penetration, the specific character of regional political culture and the state of the educational system; and b) micro-layer factors, such as the openness of the regional media system, the quality of ethnic journalism and the demand of audiences, especially young ones, for content in their native language (Mediasistema Rossii, 2015).

As a result, the digital divide between different ethnic and linguistic groups in Russia – first and foremost in terms of access and subsequently in terms of their ability to express themselves offline and online – remains an important problem. The digital divide among ethnic and linguistic communities in Russia obviously hampers the progress of the civil society, informed decision making, the maintenance of ethnic identity and the preservation of a national culture and language identity through technologically modern media communications.

Although legislators have created a legal framework for the regional state authorities and financial state-private partnerships (with telecommunication and mobile operators), the subsequent development is far from perfect. As mentioned above, for instance, the federal district of Volga demonstrated the smallest monthly internet audience (65%) among all the federal districts of Russia in 2017.¹⁰ This fact is interesting, since the Volga federal district is home to the biggest ethnic groups of Russia (excluding ethnic Russians, of course) – the Tatar, the Bashkir and the Chuvash. The situation is similar in other regions where ethnic groups often exceed the population of ethnic Russians or at least are similar in size (i.e. so-called titular nations). The Ural federal district, for example (+1% monthly internet audience in 2017 compared with 2016), is a home for the Khanty and Mansi people, the Nenets people and others; the South federal district (+3%) for the Adyghs, the Kalmyks and others; the Siberian federal district (+3%) for the Buryats, the Soyots, the Khakas and others; and the Far Eastern federal district (+7%) for the Yakuts, the Chukchi and others.

The overall dynamics suggest that the digital divide, at least in terms of access to the ICT infrastructure, among ethnic groups in Russian regions is starting to decrease. At the same time, the uneven regional development, with economic hardships in different parts of the country, the absence of statistical data on the level of users' skills and motivation to use digital technologies in Russian regions and the lack of monitoring

10. Ibid.

bodies make it difficult to determine how the digital inclusion of different ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups is progressing.

Media policy is another important area with a potentially strong influence on the digital divide. During the last decade, the Russian media policy has been aimed at the expansion of government regulation, leading to the introduction of a number of amendments. Several legislative initiatives currently implemented in the Russian media policy sphere have been subject to criticism, both public and scholarly, for example the so-called “Bloggers’ law”, stating that owners of websites and/or web pages that are visited by more than 3,000 users daily are considered to be bloggers and that such bloggers must observe certain legislative requirements, and the “Law against anonymizers and VPN”, prohibiting the use of technologies enabling access to blocked websites, also known as anonymizers. Since 2012, the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Communications, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) has also been compiling a list of sites with illegal content that must be blocked by Russian providers. Scholars, as well as representatives of public institutions and regular internet users, have been discussing the possible impact of these and other governmental initiatives on the access to information in Russia in general as well as the possible restrictions of such initiatives on digital inequality in particular.

Concluding the analysis of the digital divide realities in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society like Russia, several questions require further consideration. First, it is crucial to put the policy to overcome digital exclusion into a more general social framework to reduce national stereotypes and possible tensions on ethnic grounds. In a society that began to reconstruct its national, ethnic and cultural identity in 1991, this is not only a matter of contributing to the social inclusion of smaller ethnic groups in the society but also an attempt to create a new vision of an active and involved citizenship in a multi-ethnic and multilingual and digitalizing society. In this regard, the access problem, with its technological and economic dimensions, seems to be solved by state agencies and businesses using the available instruments over time. Motivational and educational aspects and a broader engagement problem on the other hand need to be discussed on the basis of a multi-stakeholder approach. More specifically, the implementation of policies to overcome digital gaps is hard and time consuming and requires a multi-angle and multidisciplinary approach (Deviatko, 2013).

Second, in countries like Russia that are still searching for post-transitional social and cultural identities in the context of media digitalization, media policy is deeply integrated into the state processes. Digital collaboration in society is characterized by a number of controversies. The impact of the two domains – politics and culture – is obviously the most influential. The exceptional role of the Russian state in policy making has been defined not only by the nature of the state and the state relationship with business interests but also by the sociocultural traditions of society (Nordenstreng et al., 2002). The complexity of tasks in national media policy making has become even more noticeable with the rise of digitalization and the convergence of media. Already poorly established normative principles of media policy have been challenged further

by the rise of the neoliberal philosophy of the digital online media environment, requiring minimal or no regulation. These new tendencies are increasingly influencing the present media regulation in Russia, proving that Russia remains a unique environment for media policy making in Europe.

Discussion and conclusions

In the last decades, policies and measures to prevent digital exclusion, such as improved technological infrastructures, cheap and easy access to technologies and digital literacy programmes to increase digital engagement, are considered to be key instruments in overcoming new forms of inequality across the world. Scholars have underlined the importance of and identified several approaches to policies aimed at solving the digital divide problem (Park, 2017; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). As a result, policy makers at the national and global levels have often taken such approaches as guidelines for further policy actions, for example following suggestions and solutions from different stakeholders in state and interstate strategies to build an information society (European Union) as a response to the growing digitalization and diffusion of internet services.

Several policy instruments should be mentioned as well-known and effective measures to overcome the digital divide, including the principle of universal access to the internet provided at the level of the European Union, the Council of Europe and some nation states, especially in Europe (Nieminen, 2016; Pittaluga & Rivoir, 2012; Williams et al., 2016). Policies to overcome the digital divide are also numerous in post-Socialist countries in Europe, where they generally focus on developing universal access in public places (Peruško, 2013; Vartanova, 2002). Some scholars, however stress that fundamental political and economic changes, beyond the development of telecommunication infrastructures and IT industries, are required as well (Fuchs & Novak, 2008).

Political decision making in North America and Europe has aimed to solve the very basic though crucial problem of technical access to ITC nationally and regionally. In strategic policy documents, such as information society programmes, strategies and doctrines, rights-based demands for technical access have been paralleled by concerns about economic efficiency, mainly important for private businesses. As Sparks underlined, in the new century, with the change to left-wing governments, “the general direction of the policy in both the US and the EU became one of relying more and more on the workings of the market to overcome these inequalities” (Sparks, 2013: 39).

Some national contexts, especially post-Socialism ones, like Russia, might prove that even increased legislative activities, supported by the introduction of economic subsidies as part of the media policy, create better conditions for access to technologies, networks and services and increase socially significant media content production. The

usage and literacy issues need at the same time a more complex approach combining top-down (legislative initiatives and programmes) and bottom-up (active participation of the public society and citizens) approaches for their development.

The logics of profit making have dominated in the global economic perspectives, creating better conditions for the e-economy and economic performance of large telecommunication and internet companies. However, relying on the workings of the market in overcoming gaps does not represent a holistic or equality-based approach to preventing the digital divide. Sparks emphasizes that “all these policies have failed to make any difference to the overall picture of digital inequality” (Sparks, 2013: 31).

From a normative point of view, it is clear that potential for improvement might be found mostly in the area of the formation of digital skills as well as the building of awareness and motivation. New forms of literacy, based on digital competence, have become the grounds for the Media and information literacy (MIL) policy and strategy – the key trajectory of the UNESCO activities to promote equality worldwide. The UNESCO guidelines stress that “MIL ... enable people to acquire competences to advocate and create their own counterbalance to dominant cultures thus protecting cultural diversity, multilingualism and pluralism” (Grizzle & Calvo, 2013: 13). Research has proved that, although higher levels of digital literacy have been achieved, it is still not obvious how to create a favourable environment for learning or how to nurture the capabilities of citizens (UNESCO, 2013: 17). This can probably explain why many international organizations and nations have shifted their focus in their struggle against the digital divide from general strategies to less holistic but more realistic educational programmes aimed at developing digital skills for different social groups, starting in schools and continuing with training programmes in lifelong learning formats for adults and senior citizens.

With the rise of a digital society, the ownership of digital devices, digital skills and literacy and digital engagement to a large extent define the quality of life. There is some kind of academic unanimity in identifying, analysing and theorizing the digital divide and its various layers, forms and reasons. At the same time, numerous studies clearly indicate that there are no universal strategies to overcome the problem.

The global and national experience of the last decades shows that the digital divide needs to be identified and addressed by a complex set of policies along the political, economic, technical and cultural dimensions. The complexity of policies and other measures is partly brought about by the insufficiency of the market-driven development of the telecommunication and IT industries. The traditional public service mission of media policies might be better suited to creating awareness and motivation. What is also important is to remember that overcoming digital inequalities requires a systematic, complex approach. Such an approach should combine top-down and bottom-up initiatives and programmes, be aimed at creating better public engagement, stimulate citizens to develop their digital skills to benefit from digital inclusion and involve state, business and public institutions when it comes to overcoming the digital divide in the society.

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Information and news inequalities

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Early optimistic internet evangelists addressed news and information as an area in which digital technologies would eradicate social inequality; social networks, social media and other forms of grassroots or Indymedia would establish a powerful counter-public. From today's perspective, such digital over-optimism is no longer justified. Economic resources for news production are still unevenly distributed, and inherited patterns of unequal news coverage between central and peripheral nations still prevail. Digital technologies have rather added new layers to the existing news inequalities, in particular in the political economy of news. Digital and social forms of inequality appear to be deeply intertwined in the news realm.

The rise of the web has been celebrated repeatedly since the late 1990s as having eliminated some of the main filters that previously limited the production or distribution of news and, as such, been praised for having contributed to reducing some of the main forms of inequality existing in the field of news. Thanks to the new online platforms, as for example Jay Rosen (2006) explains, “the people formerly known as the audience” have gained “the means to speak to the world, as it were”. Through this process, he notes, “media power has been equalized” (Rosen, 2006). Thanks to these same digital tools, audiences are to be considered, according to Axel Bruns, not only as being “engaged *with* what they read, hear and see” but also as being able to “engage *in* the process [of news production and circulation] itself”. They now “have access to means of content creation and dissemination that no longer necessarily constitute a system secondary to the technologies available to mainstream media organizations” (Bruns, 2010: 133, emphasis in the original). In this chapter, we would like to run against the “strong current of digital optimism” that infuses this kind of theses (Turner, 2010: 127). Accordingly, we will first expose the underpinnings of the digital optimism argument, which tends to present the rise of digital technologies as a means of undermining the domination exerted, in the field of news production and distribution, by traditional news players and thus as a means of diversifying this field. Then, basing our developments on a synthesis of the existing literature, we will

show how the rise of online platforms has, in many respects, added a new layer to the pre-existing forms of news inequality.

A new information economy that reduces news inequalities?

The development of the web has been described as having given shape to a new decentralized information economy, breaking with the preceding, much more centralized, information economy. Yochai Benkler's (2006) *The wealth of networks* is illustrative of this belief. It indeed describes the mainstream media and the web as being governed by two radically opposed structuring principles. In the old "mass-mediated environment", the information production and distribution costs were extremely high. "It is very costly to tell stories in the mass-mediated environment" (Benkler, 2006: 165). Consequently, in this "industrial economy of information", the number of players that are able to produce and circulate news is restricted and particularly unevenly distributed. However, the expansion of the web has been described as having transformed this industrial economy of information. The web has indeed provided the infrastructure for the development of a new "networked information environment", which, in many respects, thanks to its ubiquity and low costs for the ordinary user, has eliminated some of the main filters that used to impede the production and distribution of news. "The networked information economy is departing from the industrial information economy": it has allowed "a radical increase in the number of storytellers and the qualitative diversity of the stories told" (ibid.: 166).

In his book, *Cultural chaos: Journalism, news and power in a globalised world*, Brian McNair (2006) makes a similar argument. He describes the radical changes that the advent of the web produced for the information environment through a series of binary oppositions characterizing the periods before and after the rise of the web: hierarchy versus network; information scarcity versus information surplus; exclusivity versus accessibility; and homogeneity versus heterogeneity (diversity). According to this view, we have moved from a highly hierarchized information environment to a networked information environment; from a situation characterized by the scarcity of available information to its overabundance; and from a reality in which the production and distribution of news were the privilege of a limited number of "mainstream and established outlets" to the existence of "hundreds of millions of online [news] producers". "The significant augmentation of the degree of diversity of viewpoint" is thus in this context one of the main characteristics of this new online information environment (McNair, 2006: 199-202).

Interestingly, this statement on the radical changes to the information environment brought about by the advent of digital technologies is coupled with a call to change the theoretical apparatus used for trying to understand the issues at stake. McNair criticizes in particular the political economy perspective, which has, for decades, decrypted the different filters that have limited the production and distribu-

tion of news. Born in an information environment structured by highly hierarchical relations and by the scarcity of news, this theoretical perspective is presented as being ill suited to understanding the logics of a networked information environment, in which a great number of players can contribute to the production and circulation of news. “The political economy model fails to account for the complex dynamics of the twenty-first-century media system, or the unruliness of its journalistic outputs” (ibid.: viii–ix). The general picture that is given of the new digital news environment is thus one in which, thanks to the new technological opportunities granted to a multitude of new voices eager to express themselves, the power exerted by the dominant media news industries would have been, in many ways, “equalized”, to use Jay Rosen’s word.

In this chapter, we will discuss this argument, trying to show that, beyond the seeming “unruliness of [the] journalistic outputs” of the twenty-first-century news system, some of the old rules that used to govern the production and distribution of news still prevail and oppose the idea of a reduction of inequalities in this field. Moreover, the rise of online platforms has, in many respects, added new dimensions to the existing forms of inequality in news production, distribution and reception, either on the national or on the international scale.

Towards a new international digital information order?

The inequality in the production and distribution of news on the international scale has long been documented. Research on the political economy of news played an instrumental role in highlighting this inequality. Such studies were developed in the 1970s, in a context in which the inequalities structuring the international circulation of news were denounced in diplomatic arenas, in particular at UNESCO, leading to calls for the implementation of a *new international information order* (NIIO). Within this context, the political economy approach underlined the need to scrutinize the material conditions organizing the production and distribution of international news. Accordingly, the works carried out from that perspective have underscored the imbalances structuring the circulation of international news, reflected in the underrepresentation of the countries of the South in the international news provision as well in their negative representation of these countries, tending to be covered only in times of crisis (Masmoudi, 1978).

Trying to understand the causes of such imbalances, the political economy of news literature brought to light the central role of the main players in the international news trade – international news agencies and national media – in this respect. This literature described the main Western international agencies (Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters and Agence France Presse) as well as the main national media as key “gatekeepers” in the international circulation of news (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985). These agencies and media outlets

were identified as constituting key filters through which an event occurring in the world has to pass to become (or not become) a piece of news in the media of the North or of the South.

The rise of the web has, in contrast, been seen as a means of circumventing the domination exerted by these outlets in the international news circulation and reducing the imbalances that characterize it. The “online environment”, according to this perspective, offers a new “deterritorialized” space “that overrides geography and increases opportunities for non-mainstream, citizen-based news sources” (Reese et al., 2007: 254). In other words, the expansion of the web would have transformed the previous structures of international news production and distribution. In this new environment, the news agencies and other “old’ media” institutions have lost “the centrality” that they previously had “as international communications institutions” (Berger, 2009: 355-359).

These arguments need to be relativized. First, it is necessary to recall that the “traditional news organizations and broadcast companies are [still] prominent on the web” (Hindman, 2009: 13). In many respects, then, “old media’ gatekeepers” remain in place in the new online news landscape. As traditional news organizations are still important players in this field, it is not surprising to see some of the characteristic patterns of offline international news production and circulation reproduced online.

This applies in particular to the high level of dependency of the main online media in the field of foreign news on the dispatches of the main Western press agencies. In 2007, Chris Paterson showed that the websites of CNN, ABC and MSNBC, some of the “leading websites providing international news in the US”, to a large extent reproduced the contents of the dispatches of the two main press agencies of the Anglophone world, Reuters and Associated Press (Paterson, 2007: 60-63).

Moreover, as some other studies illustrate, the representation of the world that is given by the main news websites seems to be fraught with the same imbalances already described as characterizing offline media. In research explicitly echoing the works carried out in the late 1970s in the context of the calls for a new international information order, Itei Himelboim and colleagues (2010) carried out a quantitative content analysis of 223 websites of newspapers and public or private televisions in 73 countries. They conclude the existence of “a highly hierarchical structure of news flow”. Only a “very few countries” – mainly countries of the “centre” or countries of the “periphery” in crisis – were covered, while others remained largely invisible. “The evidence suggests that the news media’s use of the web sites does not take advantage of the digital technology to break traditional structural constraints and serve their audiences better in international communication” (Himelboim et al., 2010: 307-308). In this sense, as Lee Artz (2017: 59) contends, the rise of digital technologies has resulted in “more news clutter, more news stimulation, and more transnationally hegemonic news frames”.

The rise of new dominant information agents

The imbalances in the international circulation of online news documented above are not new. In many respects, they replicate well-known older inequalities. However, the rise of the web has also engendered new forms of inequality in the field of international news. The expansion of the web has indeed been accompanied by the development of a new generation of infomediaries – search engines, news aggregators and social digital networks – which have become new “domination information agents”, to coin an expression used to describe Google’s operations (Segev, 2010: xviii). These infomediaries, by the way in which they redistribute contents made by others, “produce information inequalities by promoting certain actors [...], while marginalizing others” (ibid.: XVIII).

The first element that has to be underlined is the fact that, with the rise of Google, Yahoo!, Google News, Yahoo! News, Facebook, Twitter and others, a new generation of US-based global companies, influencing the way in which people access the news around the world, has appeared, with no competitor of comparable scale. Google has more than 70 offices in more than 40 countries, and Google News is available in 35 languages and Facebook in 75.

Interestingly, although news aggregators, such as Google News, are new actors in the business of distributing news on an international scale, they too reproduce the old inequalities structuring this field. Based on a quantitative analysis of more than 65,000 articles, comparing the coverage of foreign news by Yahoo! News and Google News in the US and in India, Kohei Watanabe (2013) highlights the same kind of imbalances as those mentioned before. He notes a striking convergence in the way in which both news aggregators, in both countries, portray the world. They both offer a “skewed representation of developing countries”, under-representing them while at the same time over-representing developed ones (Watanabe, 2013: 152). Kohei Watanabe attributes the persistence of these old patterns of inequality in the representation of the world in the age of the news aggregators to the continuous predominant role of main Western press agencies as sources of foreign stories redistributed either by Yahoo! News or by Google News, in the form either of dispatches or of articles. In the online world, “the international news agenda-setting function is still [in the last instance] in the hands of Western news organizations” (ibid.: 153).

Along with search engines and news aggregators, social networks, such as Facebook, also play an increasingly important, yet relatively understudied, role in the circulation of international news. Some research nonetheless suggests that the use of Facebook as a means for circulating information will probably not result in a transformation of the skewed representation that is given of the world in the online news. Following an already well-established path, Facebook users tend to privilege breaking stories on the latest crises. As documented by Nic Newman (2011: 24) in his study of Facebook users of BBC News top stories, “Facebook users tend to be interested in major news stories or events that are funny or unusual”. In other words, the news preferences

of Facebook users also constitute a prism or filter, quite similar to the one that the mainstream media have used for decades to cover the world.

The limits of the counter-information functions of user-generated content

Until now, we have concentrated our argument on the dominant online news players (major international news agencies, news websites or aggregators), but we have not considered the multitude of smaller news websites or blogs established by journalists or amateurs eager to provide other perspectives on the world. However, these are constitutive elements of the variety of news initiatives flourishing on the web. Some of these have aimed at reducing the unequal relations structuring the representation of the world in mainstream news media. This is particularly the case of Indymedia, which, at a very early stage, was described as constituting “an important departure from traditional models of news gathering and distribution as practiced by global news agencies such as Reuters and AP” and, as such, representing “a direct and viable challenge to the mainstream media’s portrayal of important international events” (Chadwick, 2006: 302-303).

Indymedia was established in Seattle in 1999 within the context of the alter-globalization protests against the World Trade Organization. In its first years of existence, it was able to produce valuable “counter-information to the media giants”, which circulated on a transnational scale through its network of 150 independent media centres (Kidd, 2003: 64).

Quite rapidly, though, questions were raised about the ability of the news provided by Indymedia to attain a large public and effectively fulfil its “counter-information” functions. In their study of both the “traditional” and the “alternative” news content in the United Kingdom between 2007 and 2008, Joanna Redden and Tamara Witschge (2010: 179) stress the importance of Indymedia.org.uk, stating that it undoubtedly provides “different perspectives from those represented in mainstream news coverage”. However, they also underline that “it has still proven difficult for such content to reach a wide audience”, which counters, they note, the “early hopes of smaller news providers being on equal footing with transnational conglomerates” (ibid.: 181).

Moreover, while being an alternative actor, the transnational network of Indymedia’s independent media centres is structured by the same imbalances that characterize the mainstream news coverage of the world. At the end of 2003, there were more local websites of Indymedia in France (Redden & Tamara, 2010: 4) than on the whole African continent, and nearly 40 per cent of the 122 local websites were concentrated in the United States (ibid.: 47) (Mamadouh, 2004: 491-492). Having played a pioneering role, Indymedia started to decline from the mid-2000s – a decline that coincided with the expansion of the number of blogs in Western countries (Lievrouw, 2011: 143).

The rise of the blogosphere and the role that it plays in the “coverage of international events” have been considered as one of the main fields in which “do-it-yourself

news production and distribution using the internet has undoubtedly altered the established game” of mainstream media (Chadwick, 2006: 303). Due to the relative lack of empirical research, it is not an easy task to measure the role of blogs in the international circulation of international news. Ethan Zuckerman was one of the first to study this issue, in a paper that he wrote in 2005 on the contribution of the blogosphere to international reporting. One of his starting points is a critique of the lack of attention that the mainstream US media pay to international news and especially to news on developing nations. Zuckerman even goes as far as to endorse some of the calls for “media reform” outlined during the debates for a new international information order. He then examines the US blogosphere to determine whether it fills this gap, thanks to a quantitative study carried out on Blogpulse. His analysis is revealing: “Bloggers, as a whole, appear to ignore developing nations more to a greater degree than mainstream news coverage”. Furthermore, they tend to cover stories on the developing world above all when these are “primed by mainstream media” (Zuckerman, 2005: 25).

While studying this issue, Zuckerman initiated a project to struggle against these observed tendencies in the blogosphere. In December 2004, he created a content aggregator with Rebecca MacKinnon (based at the Berkman Center of Harvard University, *Global Voices*) with the objective to “make room for the so-called ‘third world’” (Zuckerman, 2013: 123). This aggregator curates, verifies and translates contents published online in blogs, in independent press and on social media platforms all over the world. As Zuckerman explained, they sought to “correct shortcomings in the professional media’s coverage of the developing world”. By “providing coverage of events that other media outlets missed”, they were expecting to “influence agenda setting” and thus to contribute to reducing the “imbalances in attention” paid to the countries of the South (ibid.: 127).

Nevertheless, *Global Voices* has not been so successful in fulfilling the objective of influencing the agenda of the mainstream media. Indeed, in consonance with the well-known shortcomings of the mainstream media’s coverage of the world, driven by breaking stories, Zuckerman acknowledges that the aggregator is used by journalists as a source of information on a given country when it experiences “sudden turmoil” or when it “suddenly bursts into the headlines”. It is not used to “find important unreported stories before they break” (ibid.: 128). This points to the persistence of the quantitative and qualitative imbalances in the global news coverage online and the difficulties of struggling against this state of affairs.

Finally, the best way to illustrate the permanence of this inequality in the media coverage of the world in digital times is perhaps to make a reference to the work that Mark Graham devoted to Wikipedia. While not, strictly speaking, being a news website, Wikipedia is, “arguably, the largest, most used, and most influential single web platform on which people are creating layers of information about our planet”. As such, to study it is illuminating for understanding the “geographies of online information” as produced through collaborative websites (Graham, 2014: 104, 110).

Studying Wikipedia, Graham offers a picture that contrasts sharply with those that present the internet “as a ‘great equalizer’”. Indeed, the author shows that the geography of information produced by the contributors to Wikipedia is “highly uneven”. Contributors, concentrated in North America and in Europe, tend to produce content on those two continents while largely ignoring the rest of the world. The US, Canada and most European countries “are characterized by highly dense virtual representations, while others are barely represented at all”. Graham concludes: “Not only is there not a lot of content created *from* the Global South, but there also isn’t a lot of content created *about* the South. A lot of people and places are both literally and figuratively left off the map” (ibid.: 110-114, emphasis in the original).

Having discussed the persistence of imbalances in the production and circulation of international news in the digital era using a macro perspective, we now study the issue of news inequality in Europe more precisely.

Continued inequalities in news production and distribution

In addition to aspects of production and circulation, inequality in news might refer to differences in (a) ownership of news outlets and (b) access to and use of news channels. Although traditional news outputs, like newspapers, have lost their appeal to audiences, traditional news organizations have not yet lost their importance in the media landscape. In effect, leading news organizations have colonized the digitalized news universe. To pre-empt the competition, they have set up “peripheral” news websites. With the resources obtained from their previous lucrative news media activities, leading news organizations have retained their dominance as news providers, exploiting the newsgathering resources and establishing the reputations of their powerful parent companies. According to James Curran:

(...) the dominant news organisations have entrenched their ascendancy because they have gained a commanding position in both the offline and online production and consumption of news. In addition, the rise of the internet as an advertising medium has led to budget cuts, increased time pressure on journalists and, sometimes, declining quality in mainstream journalism. This has not been offset by new independent news start-ups because these have been mostly too small and with too little firepower to ride to the rescue. (Curran, 2012: 21)

It seems that

gates and gatekeepers remain a critical part of the information landscape, even in the Internet age. Some ways in which online information is filtered are familiar, as traditional news organizations and broadcast companies are prominent on the Web. Other aspects of online filtering are novel. Search engines and portal Web sites are an important force, yet a key part of their role is to aggregate thousands of individual gatekeeping decisions made by others. (Hindman, 2009: 13)

As Curran (2012: 19) points out, “the rise of the internet has not undermined leading news organizations. On the contrary, it has enabled them to extend their hegemony across technologies”. If one looks at the news items and sources that the new content aggregators use, one sees that they do not usually give prominence to alternative news sources.

Nor has the internet connected the legion of bloggers to a mass audience. On the contrary, these new developments have led to inequality in the job conditions in both sectors: there is an increased precariousness of employment in online ventures compared with that (already substantial) existing in traditional news organizations. As Curran notes (2012: 20-21), news budgets have been cut “in the major mainstream media and fewer journalists are being expected to produce more content, as a consequence of newsroom redundancies, the integration of online and offline news production, and the need to update stories in a 24-hour news cycle”. This also translates into unequal output quality in the production of these news organizations.

On the other hand, the delivery of news has changed. This has given an advantage to new infomediaries, which do not produce contents but exploit the contents produced by others, mainly the major news organizations. As such, they can reinforce traditional inequalities by not giving much room to alternative media sources. By using algorithms to select information, news aggregators such as Google News prioritize some news providers over others, tending in many respects to reinforce some well-established hierarchies. In their study of the processes of infomediation by Google News, Nikos Smyrnaiois and Franck Rebillard (2009: 105) found that the latter tended to privilege “mainstream news websites offering ‘dominant’ news, possessing a large editorial staff, with a high level of daily news output”. Actually, the rise of these new infomediaries has created new inequalities in the political economy of news: the financial power of the major infomediaries far exceeds that of the main news organizations (Birkinbine et al., 2016).

In the past, there was a physical concentration of production and distribution facilities that were not easily accessible to most members of the audience. Nowadays, the members of audiences can also report news events, mainly through social media. In earlier days, the use of technologies mainly allowed one-directional contact. Hence, there was little feedback from the audiences to the media. For some, the separation of media from the audience was an inherent limitation that gave mass communication an inevitably undesirable character. In the analogue era, mainstream news media used to invite and present the views of the establishment, men and the affluent. As Herbert Gans (1979) put it long ago, citizens were simply not as equal as government representatives, and women were almost never as equal as men. Referring to class, Ehrenreich (2007) noted that the American working class has disappeared from the media. In the news, “working class people are likely to cross the screen only as witnesses to crimes or sports events, never as commentators or – even when their own lives are under discussion – as ‘experts’” (quoted in Clarke, 2016: 80). Moreover, journalists’ educational and socioeconomic backgrounds used to be different from,

actually higher than, the majority of their audiences. Gans (1979: 61) pointed out that “the news especially values the order of the upper-class and middle-class sectors of society”. According to Debra M. Clarke (2016), because journalists are positioned within these sectors themselves and many have never experienced life outside these classes, it is the wealthy and middle classes that are best represented in news.

The rise of digital technologies has not fulfilled all the hopes vested in their ability to abolish these structural imbalances. This rise has undoubtedly given the opportunity to new voices to express themselves. However, given the educational and socioeconomic background of those empowered to do so – often quite similar to those of the journalists working for the traditional media – this has not fundamentally challenged the unequal structures characterizing the sociology of news producers (Hindman, 2009; Rebillard, 2007).

Moreover, with the benefit of hindsight, recent studies on online news production by amateurs show that there is a disjuncture between the optimistic views held on the so-called Web 2.0, on the one hand, and the reality of the online participation of ordinary citizens, on the other. With the advent of digital social networks, such as Facebook, online participation increasingly tends to contribute to the distribution of online news through recommendations rather than through the actual production of online news (Guibert et al., 2016).

Inequalities in news consumption

We live in a media era in which people are able to choose among numerous media outlets within their homes: in most cases, in front of their TV or PC monitors or on their smartphones. In effect, the growth of new media and their relevant delivery systems enables changes in the patterns of consumption. It seems that people’s experience of news is being reshaped by technological changes, of course assuming that people pay attention to the news at all.

As in the case of other media content, news consumption relies on multiple new media outlets. A recent study by the Reuters Institute reveals that most people go directly to the websites of broadcasters or newspapers to access news. Nonetheless, people increasingly find news via the various search and social media services offered by digital companies like Google and Facebook. These social media have become integral to the way in which people find and access news all over the world, and mobile news notifications have become “an important new route to content and giving a new lease of life to news apps” (Newman et al., 2017: 9).

Changes in news consumption have far-reaching implications (Maier, 2010). The new media environment leads to the fragmentation of news audiences as well as to increasing selectivity of the members of these audiences (Webster, 2005; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). This picture in one way or another implies aspects of inequality, not least related to how social status and age shape the access to and use of news. Actually,

once can trace news inequality at the global, national, gender and age levels. These divides vary across countries, depending on the national characteristics, such as different media systems. One of the most striking aspects of the digital divide is the difference in news access between developed countries at the core of the world system and poor countries on the periphery. The latter lack digital infrastructures, resources and news media. As noted above, news alternatives are much rarer in less developed countries than in advanced ones.

Moreover, as it is known, the digital divide exists within societies, particularly between age groups. The internet and social media are popular worldwide, especially among younger people. Younger people, although they present a higher percentage of news avoidance than the other age groups, turn to social media for news consumption, not least through their smartphones. With this type of media flood, it would be expected that citizens can obtain news from a variety of sources and hear radically different points of view. However, the multitude of media outlets available does not necessarily mean an increased diversity of viewpoints.

Although the ways in which we can receive TV have expanded rapidly, it cannot confidently be claimed that its content has become more diverse and better quality (Maier, 2010). Television news remains the most important for older groups. However, the overall usage has continued to decline, particularly for “appointment to view” bulletins and amongst younger groups (Newman et al., 2017; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013). As Yuan notes “individual news users integrate multiple media platforms to form personal news repertoires of their own gratifications ... News users actively combine different news media sources, old and new, into complex patterns of media use” (Yuan, 2011: 999).

In one way or another, the new abundant media-rich landscape provides many options and ways in which citizens can be informed. They can consume news by choosing from a variety of media outlets and media platforms with, in most cases, overlapping or even replicated information (see Prior, 2007; Webster, 2005; Yuan, 2011). It seems that people, especially younger ones, tend to replace traditional news outlets, especially newspapers, with the internet. However, the replacement does not necessarily signal the demise of more traditional news media outlets. In addition, according to the Reuters Institute study (Newman et al., 2017), social media are significantly more important for women (who are also less likely to go directly to a news website or app) and for the young. In 2017, more than a quarter of 18-24-year-olds (28%) said that social media are their main source of news, social media exceeding television (24%) for the first time.

Again, there are discrepancies. In France, for example, Monique Dagnaud (2016) studied the online news consumption practices of disenfranchised youths (16-25 years old) from working-class families. Compared with the average youth in the same age category, they much more rarely turn to news websites or read news on blogs. Instead, they are heavier users of social networks, on which they find (rather than they seek), among other stories, short ironic or funny articles or videos.

Other European studies have also demonstrated that the rise of digital technologies has not overcome the inequalities in the consumption of news: far from it. In their quantitative and qualitative analysis of news reception in Sweden, André Jansson and Johan Lindell (2015: 93) highlight the existence of two opposite groups: the first is composed of well-educated urban respondents with “mobile lifestyles”, who were already used to accessing international news through traditional media and who use now a variety of new online media to access them; the second comprises “groups with lower levels of education, among the working classes and in provincial areas”, which are “locally oriented in their news consumption [and] not inclined to appropriate and use new transmedia technologies”.

Concluding remarks

In one way or another, media environments around the world are changing. The change is not only a change in content but also a change in the ways in which citizens discover, use, consume and interact with content. These new conditions have significant implications for what the media report, the way in which the content is consumed and, finally, the quality of informed citizenship.

It has become clear that technology is not the only necessary condition for the development of new media (in our case, news media). The developments in new technologies and the globalization of markets produce new patterns of advantage and disadvantage that, as we have seen, reinforce old inequalities. Structural social inequality is presumably not disconnected from the inequality in the digital sphere. Digital inequalities are, indeed, embedded in social structures (Helsper, 2012; van Dijk, 2005); thus, digital and social inequalities must be deeply *intertwined*. There is a kind of recurring cycle between social and digital inequality (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2016).

In this digital globalized era, one can see an overwhelming Euro-American dominance of the global news flow in mainstream or alternative media and in news consumption. Furthermore, many small, developing countries and their news media will continue to rely on a news flow that predominantly comes from the West and affluent societies. In other words, the big commercial or public news media will continue to be the dominant players in the world news domain. To sum up, there is a risk, as the OECD’s report entitled *News in the Internet age: New trends in news publishing* states, that citizens will increasingly be split into two different groups: the “information haves”, who, thanks to their social, economic and cultural capital, can benefit fully from the enhanced information ecosystem provided by the internet, and the “information have-nots”, who do not have the same opportunities (OECD, 2010: 103).

On the macro level, the Western news system reinforces its leading position and the less developed countries are forced to follow to close the gap, which nonetheless remains wide. The implications are complex. After the end of the Cold War, the

advent of the internet, the information society and the development of new media came from the West or the more advanced societies. The rest is obliged to follow to keep in touch with the developments or to increase their relative or virtual power in their regions.

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Chapter 14

Why free news matters for social inequality

Comparing willingness to pay for news in the Nordic region

Hallvard Moe

This chapter discusses inequality from the perspective of media use. It analyses patterns of news consumption and willingness to pay for news in three comparatively well-off countries – the small Nordic welfare states of Finland, Denmark and Norway. The chapter reveals significant dissimilarities between these case countries, which we need to understand in relation to the countries' wider media systems as well as historically. By zooming in on news consumption in Denmark, Finland and Norway, we also gain a better understanding of how subtle inequalities play out within these societies. News that is free to users matters as a resource for the citizenship of specific social groups. The implication is that regulatory schemes need to be developed that facilitate quality news provision through channels that are free at the point of use.

To function as citizens in a democracy, we need access to information about public issues, and we need to gain insights into the running of society and its political institutions. News media are seen as a key source that serves this function. If the access to and use of news are unevenly distributed, they can foster social inequality. This is the basic reasoning behind the long-standing research interest in media's effects on the distribution of knowledge (see McQuail, this volume, chapter 2), most recently thematized through the term digital divide. Research on and debates about the digital divide often focus on cases with great imbalance. Prime examples are the polarization in US political communication and the differences between wealthy and poor countries concerning access and literacy (see also Vartanova & Gladkova, this volume, chapter 12). Nonetheless, it is also helpful to pay attention to another kind of cases to understand how inequality plays out in a digital media system, a setting in which the social, political and economic divides appear to be less dramatic. What does inequality in the media look like if we compare similar cases?

This chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of inequality in the media through an analysis of conditions in societies that are alike and performing quite well in terms of informational gaps. I approach the issue from the perspective of media use, utilizing comparative, up-to-date empirical data on news consumption and focusing

on patterns of paying for news. As news consumption moves from print to digital, a key question raised by the media business is whether or not consumers are willing to pay for journalism online. With an interest in informational divides, the question is how different social groups gain access to news as print newspaper distribution declines and journalism is hidden behind paywalls on the web.

The case countries are Denmark, Finland and Norway, commonly labelled by political scientists as representatives of a shared Nordic welfare state model. These countries are also frequently lumped together in comparisons of media systems and tend to be highlighted either as individual representatives of “the Nordics” or as shorthand for a group of countries when scholars, politicians and practitioners need an example of states with relatively well-functioning public interest media. That being said, tendencies observed internationally – of populist politics on the rise, increasing social divisions and a journalistic business in crisis – have also left their mark on these countries. Exactly how practices of news consumption are affected in such turbulent times is a question that remains largely unanswered, and a comparative perspective should yield a better understanding.

The analysis is based on survey data from 2016-2018 and will shed light on two aspects. The first concerns differences between similar countries. I will argue that a closer examination of news consumption data reveals significant dissimilarities between these case countries, which need to be understood in relation to the countries’ wider media systems as well as historically. Second, more importantly, focusing on news consumption in Denmark, Finland and Norway can provide a better understanding of how subtle inequalities play out within contexts with high ICT penetration, stable news provision and relatively egalitarian social structures. The argument that I will make, then, is that (1) we should be aware of the shortcuts that we make when we group together cases in comparative media system analyses, especially when dealing with ongoing, fast-changing developments, and (2) inequalities in the media matters, even under conditions that are comparatively favourable. By analysing how willingness to pay for news off- and online is unevenly distributed among different social groups, I will argue that news that is free to users – whether in the form of ad or public funding – matters as a resource for the citizenship of specific social groups. The implication is that regulatory schemes need to be developed that facilitate quality news provision through channels that are free at the point of use. As such, this chapter zooms in on one of the policy goals addressed by McQuail in his chapter, namely that of “more equal access as audiences to diverse sources and forms of provision” (McQuail, 2019: 39).

In the following, I first review the literature on media system comparisons, as that work has developed over the last decade. I place the Nordic countries within that debate, describe the basics of the three case countries, Denmark, Finland and Norway, and substantiate the choice of comparing these cases in relation to the present issue. Next, I present the data used: comparative survey data from 2016, 2017 and 2018 stemming from the Reuters Institute’s *Digital news report*. On this basis, I discuss inequalities and seek to understand them in the context of recent developments.

Comparing similar media systems to understand inequalities

The last decade has seen an upsurge in the interest among media and communication scholars in comparisons of media systems and their relations to politics and the state.¹ Much of the interest can be traced to the book *Comparing media systems – Three models of media and politics* published by Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini in 2004. Building on an impressive patchwork of studies from a range of countries and languages over a significant period of time, Hallin and Mancini distinguish between: (a) the North Atlantic or liberal model, (b) the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model and (c) the North/Central European democratic corporatist model. The latter includes the Nordic countries (excluding Iceland), Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 11, 89ff.). These countries' media systems are, according to Hallin and Mancini, characterized by early development of the press, a shift away from political pluralism towards neutral commercial press, strong institutionalized professionalism and strong state intervention.

The typology launched by Hallin and Mancini stimulated two types of responses. On the one hand, there were studies that aimed to apply the model and extend it through empirical studies of new areas. On the other hand, there were contributions that criticized the overall project and proposed a different way forward.

The first category contains projects with a clear empirical ambition to extend the foundations laid by Hallin and Mancini. The contributions include an edited volume taking the eastern and southern models (Hallin & Mancini, 2012) and the work of scholars such as Jonathan Hardy (2008) and Katrin Voltmer (2008), proposing alternative interpretations. Within specific subfields, especially political communication, the model is used as a starting point for discussing intraregional differences (e.g. Strömbäck et al. (2008) on political communication in the Nordic region). Such contributions have added to our empirical understanding of the relations between political systems and media systems across regions of the world and updated our knowledge base.

The second category of responses comprises those that are explicitly critical of Hallin and Mancini's efforts. A range of issues has been brought up, and specific labels and categories have been disputed, including the temporal dimension of Hallin and Mancini's model (Hardy, 2012). The roles of certain institutions, such as religious ones, have been identified as missing from the original model (Couldry, 2007). According to Hallin, digital media and the internet are "a big hole" in the book (in Moe & Sjøvaag, 2009: 137). This has consequences especially for the discussions of current tendencies in media systems, such as their potential convergence, which has been duly noted (e.g. Syvertsen et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Hallin and Mancini's focus on traditional news media, predominantly the printed press, led to criticism. From a media system perspective, the model builds predominantly on factors relevant to journalism, whereas the role of cinema and television, the book industry or ICT use receive little attention. From a political

1. This section builds on parts of the research by Syvertsen and colleagues (2014, 2015).

system perspective, the analysis emphasizes factors directly related to media governance, particularly traditional news media. As a result, aspects describing the political system and the role of the state in more general terms or pertaining to the media in a more indirect way are overlooked. Factors that are more commonly found in, for instance, communication histories or works by political scientists could have produced a different outcome (Syvertsen et al., 2014).

The last point is important in light of another, more fundamental critique. Some (e.g. Hardy, 2008) have argued that Hallin and Mancini show a relative disregard of factors that could differentiate systems. From the perspective of historical institutionalism, this critique – which could be directed to the field of comparative media studies in general – concerns a lack of historical empirical nuances. In one contribution, Peter Humphreys (2012) argues that, “rather than expend time and energy on producing neat typologies, it is much more important to explore in depth a more comprehensive range of salient political, legal and economic variables that bear on the media system” (Humphreys, 2012: 172). If we do the latter, Humphreys continues, we will find path dependency. Here, path dependency means that historically grounded national institutional differences would explain the continued national differences. As a result, one should expect earlier policy choices to have a determining influence on later ones. The call is, basically, for more in-depth and limited comparisons with historical attention to enrich our pool of knowledge, which in turn might be used for modelling.

Such a critique could be dismissed as banal, as it tends to be based on the individual’s perspective: when we try to understand aspects of media systems, we do so with better knowledge of a certain system than others, grounded in our own professional and personal experiences. An attempt at describing a phenomenon from the outside triggers the urge for an insider to correct misconceptions or expand on details. Sure enough, while Humphreys (2012) schools Hallin and Mancini in specificities of German and UK media – in which he is an expert – he simultaneously lumps together a few other countries as “Scandinavia”. For someone with expert knowledge of any one Scandinavian country, a similar reaction is triggered.

From a Danish, Finnish or Norwegian perspective, it seems clear that Hallin and Mancini base their description of the relations between the media systems and the political systems in the Nordic countries on an (historical) analysis that seems to be heavily biased towards Sweden. The approach that I have opted for here can be seen partly to answer the call by Humphreys, but my aim is not to undertake historical single-case analyses. Rather, I want to discuss the current differences between cases and seek to understand these differences with the aid of historical insights and wider knowledge of the political and social contexts. Specifically, I aim to thicken the description and update our understanding of the Nordic region by focusing on one aspect of media use (news consumption) in one period (around 2016-2018) in three countries (Denmark, Finland and Norway). As such, my approach is a small-N, most similar countries design (Lijphart, 1975).

The argument for focusing on the Nordic region is its relatively good conditions for journalism and small digital divides (e.g. Curran et al., 2009). The reason for selecting three of the five Nordic countries (excluding Iceland and Sweden) is threefold. The first is pragmatic and concerns space limitations and the opportunities to dig into specificities. The second is a reaction to the perceived focus on Sweden in the previous debates comparing media systems. The third reason concerns size; Sweden has roughly double the number of inhabitants and Iceland less than a tenth of the inhabitants of Norway, Denmark and Finland (all between 5 and 6 million). The aim of this design is, on a basic level, to highlight aspects of existing patterns of news consumption that – through comparison with similar cases – stand out as potentially problematic. It is hard to say, exactly, how much inequality of different kinds is too much or more than expected. A comparative analysis, with similar cases, facilitates a reasoned assessment of the findings.

On this level of analysis, the aim is to add nuance, which in turn helps us to understand the conditions within the case countries, including inequalities in media use. I do not want to argue that willingness to pay for news (or media systems more generally) ought to be similar across borders and political systems. My argument is, however, normative in the sense that, by invoking “inequality” to describe difference, I signal a want of equality. This should not be understood as an expectation or goal of identical news use (everyone paying for and reading the same sources for the same amount of time, etc.). What I do hold as an ideal is equal rights to access relevant societal information, make use of journalism and more generally connect to the public. Media consumption and usage represent one indicator of how such rights work in practice (Nieminen, this volume, ch. 3). As Abbott (2015) has argued, “inequality” in this sense is perhaps better understood as “injustice”. The motivation for comparing patterns of news consumption and willingness to pay for news within three well-off countries is that it helps to bring out exactly how unevenness can lead to unjust conditions for citizens.

Media systems and news use in Denmark, Finland and Norway

If earlier contributions to describing the media systems of countries in the Nordic region can be criticized for overlooking nuanced differences, how can they be described better? In a recent book, Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) propose a Nordic perspective. The idea is neither to deny that traditional, nationally distinct media and regulatory models have been under massive pressure from globalizing forces over the last decades nor to downplay the variations between Nordic countries. Rather, the book takes as a starting point the fact that the Nordic media and communication systems are distinct to the extent that they stand out in the world (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 2). On that basis, Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) argue that the organization of the media systems in the Nordic region builds on four principles, which are changing but remain in place:

1. An organization of vital communication services that underscores their character as *public goods*, with extensive cross-subsidies and obligations toward universality.
2. A range of measures used to institutionalize *freedom from editorial interference* and self-governance in day-to-day operations.
3. A *cultural policy that extends to the media* in the form of content obligations and support schemes that aim to secure diversity and quality.
4. A preference for consensual solutions that are durable and involve *cooperation between main stakeholders*: the state, communication industries and the public. (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 17)

To substantiate this approach, one can dig into the history of certain parts of the media, for example the press, and argue that the press in all the Nordic countries can be characterized by a “well-respected freedom of the press, an established self-regulatory regime, state support for a private commercial press, and a resulting diverse structure with universal appeal and high levels of consumption” (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 69-70). Furthermore, on the issue of media use, one can argue that the postwar period brought a distinct norm to the region, where the media were seen as “a vehicle for information and culture and less as a vehicle for entertainment than in many other countries and regions” (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 44). The resulting media use patterns featured egalitarianism and commonality – mirroring the ideals of universality and equal access to services of high quality, deemed central to the Nordic welfare states, which in general terms has “emphasized reducing social inequalities” (Kvist & Fritzell, 2012: 10).

One can also delve into history to bring out nuances to such an argument (see Syvertsen et al., 2015). Differences are also quite easy to spot today: local and regional newspapers, for instance, continue to play a significant role in the media markets of Finland and Norway, as opposed to Denmark. However, the influx of so-called freesheets – gratis print newspapers – from the mid-1990s, which happened across the region, spared Norway (Syvertsen et al., 2014).

Differences do not, however, just arise when comparing countries. Despite the overall description of egalitarianism and well-functioning welfare state policies, social inequality also exists within the case countries (see Kvist & Fritzell, 2012 for a comprehensive volume). Media use patterns mirror such inequality. Surveys of news consumption typically find significant but, comparatively speaking, small differences between groups of users (e.g. Bruhn Jensen & Helles (2015) on Denmark; Moe & Kleiven (2016) on Norway; Ohlsson and colleagues (2017) on Sweden). Sociologists have also paid attention to how distinct cultural practices and media use play out in these societies. They argue that omnivorism is a key trait (e.g. Gripsrud et al. (2011) on Norway; Harrits and colleagues (2009) on Denmark; Purhonen and colleagues (2010) on Finland), with the educational level playing a key role.

This warrants a comparison of news use. Paying for news is at the core of the challenge of inequality for the following reason: in the transformation from print

to digital, after a decade or so with free access for all, the problem of inducing users to pay for the news that they consume is high on the agenda of the media sector as well as that of politicians (e.g. Kvalheim, 2013; Pickard & Williams, 2014). One key strategy has been to charge money for “exclusive” or “premium” content or journalism deemed to be of high quality, such as investigative stories, and simultaneously to give away news agency stories and quicker, shorter articles for free (e.g. Carson, 2015). At the same time, media policy schemes to support journalism, stemming from the analogue era, have focused on for-pay news, for example by counting sales as a basis for support or through VAT exemptions. This could yield a tendency for quality differences between journalism that is free at the point of use and journalism that is not. As such, it potentially creates information inequality with relevance to just citizenship conditions, that is, if the patterns of users who are willing to pay for news are systematically skewed.

Method and data: Comparative statistics on news consumption and practices

The analysis is based on data from the survey behind the *Digital news report*.

Commissioned by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, with national partners across Europe, the survey is conducted by Yougov with an online questionnaire at the start of each consecutive year (see Newman et al. (2017) for the most recent international report). The case countries are included along with roughly 30 other countries in Europe and worldwide.

The data used here stem from the 2016, 2017 and 2018 surveys.² The samples are based on self-recruited panels. One advantage of using panels is the high motivation levels among the respondents. One disadvantage is that the samples are prone to biases, basically since certain types of people are more likely to volunteer for inclusion and longevity in such panels – as could be said of all kinds of survey research. However, the tests conducted by Strabac and Aalberg (2011) show only marginal differences between the answers given by telephone respondents and those given by web panel participants on issues of news knowledge and related questions.

Importantly, the samples in the Reuters data sets only reflect the population in each country that has access to the internet. For many of the countries in the general study, this is a major problem. For the three case countries selected here, however, it is less of a problem due to the very high levels of internet penetration: Reuters Institute’s comparable data indicate that the numbers for this aspect are 96 per cent for Denmark and Norway and 92 per cent for Finland. The data have been weighted.

2. 2016: Denmark: N = 2041, Finland: N = 2007, Norway: N = 2019. 2017: Denmark: N = 2011, Finland: N = 2007, Norway: N = 2056. 2018: Denmark: N = 2025, Finland: N = 2012, Norway: N = 2027. All the data sets have distribution across gender, age and geography as well as household income and so on. For more details, see <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org>.

Any respondents who stated that they had not consumed any news in the past month were filtered out of the data sets. The survey included questions on news habits, brand preferences, media platform use, mobility in news use, interest in different kinds of news, attitudes towards paying for news, attitudes towards advertisements and trust in news as well as background questions on basic demographic variables. As tends to be the case with large-scale surveys conducted across many countries and over several years, some questions are repeated each year, while others are not. I will identify the year(s) from which the data stem for each of the reported findings.

In the following, I use descriptive statistics to compare the cases using a range of relevant variables. I also include segmentation values based on several variables to address the question of inequalities within the individual countries. When analysing inequality within the case countries, I focus on self-reported educational levels.

Analysis: Interest in, use of and willingness to pay for news

Before I zoom in on the patterns of payment for news and consider where the three case countries differ, it is worth underlining their similarities on two levels.³ First, in general, when comparing the Nordic countries with countries that have radically different social, political and economic conditions, they seem alike. For instance, looking at how many respondents stated that they sometimes avoid the news, the case countries all score low (2-4 per cent said “often”),⁴ while the numbers are much higher in countries such as Mexico (12%), Greece (15%) and Turkey (18%). This draws attention to the egalitarian traits in media use in the case countries.

Considering the use of so-called digital-born news brands, in all the case countries, under 50 per cent of the respondents reported using such brands for news in the last week. For countries further south and east, the corresponding numbers are higher than 70 per cent (e.g. Greece: 88%). From the perspective of a comparison of all countries, then, the data underline and substantiate the basic proposal that the Nordic countries together stand out globally.

Second, the similarities are also worth stressing on another level: for a range of variables, when focusing on just these three cases, they appear to be quite similar. Calculating the number of news sources used by the respondents shows very similar patterns (with statistically significant variation only between Finland and Denmark at each end of the scale; those who use merely one source and those who use more than seven sources). Another illustration would be the centrality of smartphones for news consumption: 39 per cent of Norwegians, 34 per cent of Finnish people and 40 per cent of Danes stated that the smartphone is their main way to obtain news. The point here is to say that not only do the three countries appear to be similar when compared

3. All the percentages in the following three paragraphs refer to 2017.

4. The reasons given for avoiding the news, however, differ, for example with Finnish respondents stating more often that “I don’t feel there is anything I can do about it” (36% vs. Norwegians with 28% and Danish people with 26%).

with very different cases but also they appear to be similar even when focusing on just Denmark, Finland and Norway. The same applies to the news consumption in general: all the three countries show quite egalitarian patterns of use for many variables, as expected.

Turning now to where the data display disparities between the countries and highlight inequalities within them, the object is to bring out the differences and highlight the patterns of skewed distribution between social groups – not to argue that the countries are deeply different across our data or that citizens within each of the three countries experience globally unfair conditions.

In the following, I first compare the interest in different forms of news and the segmentation of types of news use in the three case countries. This prepares the ground for an analysis of distribution between groups within each country on the issue of willingness to pay for news.

Interest in and use of news

While I have already mentioned the low numbers of respondents claiming to avoid the news, the question remains of how much interest people have in news in general as well as in specific kinds of news and how these interests are translated into practices of consumption.

Figure 1. Interest in different kinds of news: Percentage stating “extreme interest” in each type, across case countries, 2017

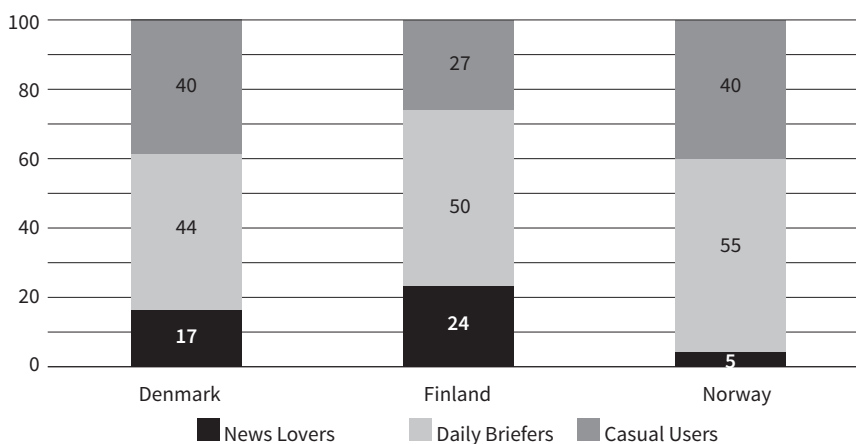


Comment: Denmark, N=2,011. Finland, N=2,007. Norway, N=2,056.

Source: Reuters Digital News Report, 2017.

When asked about general interest in news, the responses differ between the cases. Norwegians appear to be less interested, with 7 per cent claiming to be “extremely” interested. The corresponding numbers in Denmark and Finland are significantly higher (20% and 25%, respectively). This is also reflected when asked about interest in specific kinds of news. Finnish respondents significantly more often state that they are extremely interested in international news (FI: 24%; DK: 17%; NO: 10%), news about their region or city (FI: 34%; DK: 16%; NO: 11%), business and economic news (FI: 13%; DK: 10%; NO: 4%) and health and education news (FI: 17%; DK: 8%; NO: 6%) (see Figure 1). Not only do the Finnish users come across as having the greatest interest in news, they also claim to be more thorough: when asked about specific modes of news use, 60 per cent of Finnish respondents stated that they “read news stories or articles” as a key mode, compared with 41 per cent and 42 per cent in Norway and Denmark.

Figure 2. Segmentation into three types of news users, 2018, based on variables on frequency of news use and interest in news combined (per cent)



Comment: Denmark, N=2,025. Finland, N=2,012. Norway, N=2,027.

Source: Reuters Digital News Report, 2018.

Figure 2 presents how such interests are turned into practices. The figure divides the respondents into three segments: news lovers, daily briefers and casual users. It shows a markedly smaller group of news lovers in Norway (5%) than in the other two cases (FI: 24% and DK: 17%). This confirms the impression given through statements of interests: Norwegians are very eager news consumers to a lesser extent.

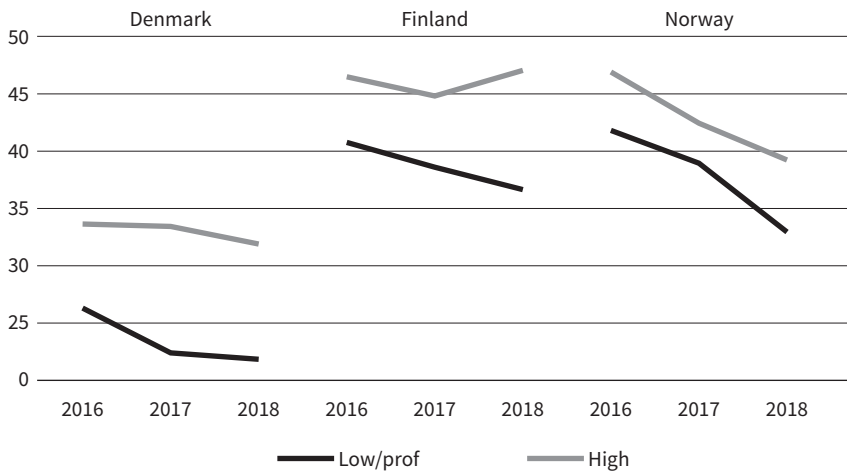
Figure 2 also imparts something about the distribution within each country: in Finland and Norway, over half of the respondents identified as “daily briefers”, while Norway and Denmark have equal percentages of “casual users” (40%). This means that Denmark has the greatest division of the three: a comparatively large segment of news lovers combined with a comparatively large segment of those who only use news

casually. As such, Denmark appear to have a news use pattern that is most at risk of fostering unequal conditions for citizens. Norwegians, on the other hand, through this segmentation analysis, confirm their position as the population that is least interested in news. The question is how these different traits play out in relation to the patterns of willingness to pay between groups with different educational levels.

Willingness to pay for news

Recent discussions of willingness to pay for news have tended to focus solely on digital media. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how (un)willingness to pay for news might facilitate information gaps and inequality in access to societal information, it is important to include analogue media as well. In the following, I compare the differences between, on the one hand, respondents with low educational levels (high school or lower) and professional qualifications, and, on the other hand, those with university degrees.

Figure 3. Distribution of the willingness to pay for print news in the three countries, 2016-2018, per educational level (per cent)



Comment: "Low/prof" includes "not completed high school", "high school" and "professional qualification". "High" includes degrees at the Bachelor, Master or PhD level.
 2016: Denmark, N = 2,041, Finland, N = 2,007, Norway, N = 2,019. 2017: Denmark, N = 2,011, Finland, N = 2,007, Norway, N = 2,056. 2018: Denmark, N = 2,025, Finland, N = 2,012, Norway, N = 2,027.

Source: Reuters Digital News Report, 2016-2018.

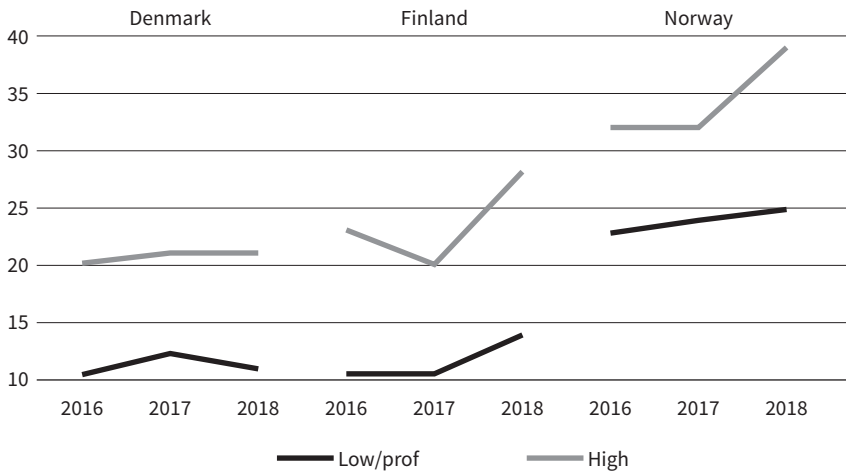
Figure 3 covers print news, in the form of both subscriptions and (ir)regular direct sales. The overall differences in levels between the three countries are striking: the Danish case stands out with generally much lower numbers; the probability of highly educated Danes paying for print news is lower than the probability among the less educated Finnish. Another striking difference between the cases concerns the general

trends from 2016 to 2018. While we should be careful not to overstate tendencies based on three data points, the Norwegian case shows a much steeper fall in willingness to pay for print news – for groups with high (an 8 percentage point drop) as well as low/professional education (a 9 percentage point drop). Finland, in contrast, experienced a more moderate fall (4 percentage points for the “low/prof” category) and even a slight increase for those with university degrees.

The findings reveal inequality in practices for this kind of news provision in the sense that those with a low educational level consistently reported less willingness to pay for news. Importantly, the gaps between the two groups also increased over the three years in all the cases, though only slightly in Norway and Denmark (1 and 2 percentage points, respectively) and more in Finland (5 percentage points).

So far, the findings point to inequalities in access. They also seem to confirm some features of the different countries, such as a less strong tradition of newspaper subscriptions in Denmark. It is difficult to judge, though, whether the general, comparably low willingness to pay for print in Denmark is balanced by a willingness to pay for online media and, similarly, whether the steep decline in Norway is balanced by a general rise in the willingness to pay for journalism online. The question also remains of how Finnish respondents’ continued practices with print news are coupled with their online practices.

Figure 4. Distribution of the willingness to pay for online news in the three countries, 2016-2018, by educational level (per cent)



Comment: 2016: Denmark, N = 2,041, Finland, N = 2,007, Norway, N = 2,019. 2017: Denmark, N = 2,011, Finland, N = 2,007, Norway, N = 2,056. 2018: Denmark, N = 2,025, Finland, N = 2,012, Norway, N = 2,027.

Source: Reuters Digital News Report, 2016-2018.

Figure 4 follows the same logic as Figure 3 but presents the findings for willingness to pay for online news in any form, whether subscription based or not, including differ-

ent forms of bundling with other digital products. Giving attention first to the overall differences between the countries, Norway clearly had the highest willingness to pay. Denmark and Finland come across as more similar, especially for the two first years, while Finnish respondents reported higher numbers in 2018. When seen in relation to the findings regarding print news presented above, these observations show that Denmark lags behind in general willingness to pay: it is low for print as well as digital news. The Finnish remaining practices with regard to print news means that the overall probability of people having access to for-pay journalism is higher, despite the slow uptake of for-pay online news. Norwegians, on the other hand, seem to trade print news for online news, in the sense that the fast decline in paying for print is countered, at least partly, by comparatively high numbers of people paying for online news, with an increase over the time period studied.

Regarding the differences between the two educational groups, it is worth noting that the increase from 2016 to 2018 is by and large made up of those with high educational levels. More interestingly, the gaps between the two groups are either stable (10 percentage points in Denmark) or increasing (from 12 to 14 percentage points in Finland and from 9 to 14 percentage points in Norway). Importantly, the gaps between the groups are more substantive than those for print media.

In sum, in the transfer from print to online news, Danish news providers seem to be stuck with a customer base with lower willingness to pay – a problem that is less significant in Norway (where users pay for online news to a larger extent) and less critical in Finland (where users still pay for print news). Even in the group with a low educational level, 37 per cent of the respondents have paid for a print newspaper in the last week. As such, print newspapers still constitute an egalitarian, and much used, source of news in Finland. When it comes to online news, however, the picture is more skewed towards groups with higher education. Here, Finland is very similar to Denmark. However, in Denmark, the egalitarianism of print news seems to be absent: not only is paying for print news a practice that is more widespread among the higher-educated groups, it is also in general less widespread. In comparison, more Danes rely on free news sources, those with low educational levels more so than those with higher levels. The analysis has, however, shown that such differences characterize all the case countries across the print and digital spheres. If free news becomes less thorough and more tabloidized, this difference will constitute a challenge for attempts to secure just distribution of resources for citizenship.

Conclusion

The first objective of this paper was to bring out the differences between cases that at the outset, and when viewed from afar, seem alike – in this case, the countries of Denmark, Finland and Norway. These countries represent what are often promoted as key examples of a certain model of welfare states. The second aim

was to scrutinize the systematic differences in news use within such relatively egalitarian societies.

The data and discussion presented here offered up-to-date insights into news consumption in three countries at the forefront of the development of the digital media uptake. I compared interest in news and types of news use and then focused on willingness to pay for news. To sum up what characterizes each of the cases, I could perhaps use the following descriptions. Norwegian news consumption seems to have engaged full speed ahead towards a digital future but risks losing some key news habits and key components of the press structure on the way. The respondents in Norway stand out as being overall more prone to use digital media in a “more advanced” way, for example paying for content. By comparison, Finnish news users seem to be solid but slow if the aim is a transition to digital media. Traditional news media and habits seem to be stronger in Finland than in the two other cases. The upside then, is that the key components of news use, such as paying for a newspaper and showing a high level of interest in news, remain strong – at least so far. Danish news users, on the other hand, might be said to be moving quickly towards digital news, like Norwegians, but without taking up the habit of paying for it. This illustrates that systematic small-N comparisons based on comparable data can be helpful when “thickening” our understanding of how cases that are often lumped together can show differences.

Within the cases, the comparison highlighted differences. I focused on educational levels. Concerning interest in news, the analysis showed that Denmark has the biggest (relatively speaking) divide between those with little interest and less substantial news habits and those with high interest levels, the avid news users. By identifying the groups that are least likely to pay for news off- and online, the analysis showed how the general pattern in Denmark – described above as a fast move towards digital while keeping the tendency to avoid paying – is unequally spread among the population. Groups with less education are much less prone to pay for news of any kind. Though there are important differences between the cases, the findings indicate clearly skewed patterns of news use in groups with different educational levels in all three countries. As such, even in the Nordic region, with favourable policy frameworks, high ICT penetration and comparatively well-functioning journalistic media, this main way to access relevant societal information is tilted towards those with higher education. If the differences between for-pay and for-free news are substantial, the consequence is inequality in the resources that people have to act as citizens.

Further research should include analyses of journalistic content to determine how differences between for-pay and for-free news develop. The findings presented here, however, underline the importance of regulatory authorities that are interested in facilitating just opportunities for access to societal information paying attention to the conditions for news provision for which citizens do not have to pay.

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Representation, participation and societal well-being

Addressing inequality in agency in Europe

Auksė Balčytienė & Kristina Juraitė

This chapter employs the idea of “inequality in agency” and examines it in the context of representation studies. With the help of the European Social Survey data from 2016,¹ the chapter claims that, across Europe, individuals are confronted with dissimilar contextual conditions (political cultures and media functioning habits and traditions, socio-economic environments and social norms) and express different feelings and individual capacities (such as self-confidence and social trust as well as personal and social capital endowments) to pursue and appreciate societal well-being in its fullest sense. As suggested here, “inequality in agency” arises as a result of “inequality in representation”, which is linked with underlying differences between the dominant political and media systems, on the one hand, and the civil society structures, on the other. This study predominantly considers public perceptions of political and social inclusiveness and representation and examines them in connection with the media and digital information environments existing in different European countries.

As popularly inferred, modern democracies across today’s Europe are performing on the margins of the customary understanding of representative democracy (Parvin, 2018). Among the most commonly identified trends is a decrease in political trust, signalling a broader systemic crisis of representative democracy in the Western world (Lefkofridi et al., 2012). Across Europe, conventional political ideologies and standard party politics are slowly giving ground to populist movements and other types of associational formations running on individualist and performative claims (Aalberg et al., 2014). In some of those, predominantly in the region of former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where democracies are still defined as young and weakly consolidated, nationalist ideologies infused with populist and protectionist catchphrases seem to be playing one of the dominant roles, further eroding fragile democratic institutions and ushering in hyper-partisanship and nationalist neo-authoritarianism (Bajomi-Lázár, 2017; Balčytienė, 2015; Vobič et al., 2014). In

1. ESS Round 8: European Social Survey Round 8 Data (2016). Data file edition 1.0. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

Balčytienė, Auksė & Juraitė, Kristina (2019). Representation, participation and societal well-being: Addressing inequality in agency in Europe in Josef Trappel (ed.) *Digital media inequalities: Policies against divides, distrust and discrimination*, pp. 245-264. Göteborg: Nordicom.

other regions – mostly in the Western European democracies – conventional party ideologies “strengthened” with populist extremism and radicalization are gaining ground, constituting a challenge on an unprecedented scale to the liberalist ideals of democracy and representative forms of government (Bergmann, 2017). Southern European countries (Italy and Spain) are preoccupied with yet another phenomenon, namely further polarization of party relations that increase political battles and societal conflicts, expand social cleavages, intensify political and economic turmoil and contribute to overall disruption.

Though various studies have explained the fiascos of equal political representation in Europe (Lefkofridi et al., 2012; Parvin, 2018), most of those accounts neglect the appeal and engaging character of contemporary digitized environments and information in general. Exposure to news and political information – an indispensable process from a democratic decision-making perspective – appears to be challenged repeatedly and radically through intensified networked communications and the decline of the dominance of conventional news media and professional journalism in the daily informational accounts of the European public. Though established news media still have a relatively respected and reputable position in some countries, intensified information consumption and production on the side of the audience appear among those critically important issues that need to be addressed in more detail (Cardoso, 2011).

The research questions addressed in this chapter are as follows: How do media and digitized environments contribute to the shaping of the twenty-first century citizenship? Do people feel more informed and experienced and hence do they act as politically engaged citizens or, conversely, do they feel more uncertain and insecure, controlled and manipulated and inclined to stay away from politics? How do such performance differences, variations and eventually inequalities come about, and what effects do they have on daily democratic life across Europe?

Enhanced populist political polarization appears as a commonality among the recognized political shifts in all European countries (Mancini, 2013). Though there might be various issues (such as socio-economic background, education and other reasons) acting as causes of increased ideological divergence and group conflicts, media and networked communications play an important role in their uprising. Hence, we aim to suggest that specificities of the dominant political and communication culture, originating within and preserved by both political and media systems of a country, also play a significant role in the creation of conflicts, clashes and divisions.

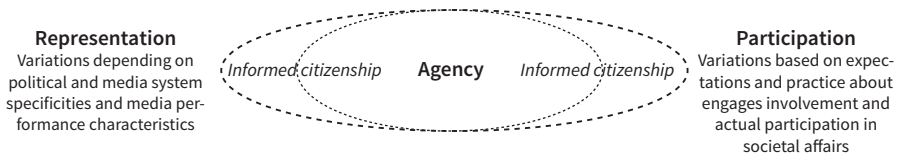
One presumption that we would like to test in this study is that societies (predominantly those in the southern and eastern–central parts of Europe) with stronger aspects of personified politics and a more openly expressed conflictual political culture and political parallelism (cf. Hallin & Mancini, 2004), thus manifesting higher degrees of political and social polarization, will be polarized even further due to intensified informational exchanges applied in networked structures of modern communication systems. It also seems plausible that networked communications will trigger self-expressive means of political self-actualization and engagement, especially in

countries where the conventional news media are elite-oriented and focused on clientelist interests, neglecting the voices of ordinary citizens (Curran, 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Örnebring, 2012).

With these factors in mind, we posit that dominant media systems and information environments in certain European countries contribute to and create inequality of representation across Europe. According to classical visions of democracy, unequal representation and a lack of institutional and interpersonal trust are critical for democracy. If the interests of some groups of people are neglected and represented unequally, even by elites and general social institutions, it means that representative democracy does not live up to its ideals and principles of a fully socially inclusive, that is, empowering, society.

In this chapter, we follow the conventional idea that “inequality in agency” – outlined here as variations in people’s actions expressing their individual power – arises from information and representation inequalities, which further translates into “participatory inequality”, indirectly contributing to the stratification of the effective use of political rights across contemporary Europe (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The interplay between representation, agency and participation



We understand that this is indeed an ambitious and broad perspective that might lead to further inquiries regarding whether democracy (and which version of it) survives when the role of conventional news media and journalism seems to be degraded further and even supplemented and replaced with other types of information production and distribution. We limit ourselves to a more focused inquiry here. We base our presumption on the idea that engagement and participation in political debate are an important component of a functioning political system. Such an activity, however, rests on a set of presumptions, namely inclusiveness of the political system and individual capacities. The variations observed in the application of that activity in different countries invite us to question which types of stratification, inequality and variation are arising across Europe as a result of intensified information exposure and use of news media and networked communications.

As will be shown in the following sections of the chapter, growing distrust, uncertainty and feelings of powerlessness permeate public perceptions and popular discourses in many countries of today’s Europe. Increasing discontent related to informational ignorance and lack of equality among views and voices in the media might eventually reduce political equality – without which a fully democratic society is at risk.

Conceptual framework

Our discussion here opens with a classical viewpoint that inspects a number of the underlying normative preconditions and prerequisites for democracy, predominantly those of a free flow of information, equal representation and active and engaged citizenry (Calhoun, 2011; Curran, 2014; Putnam, 2000; Silverstone, 2004).

This normative viewpoint on democracy – and hence on social and political equality and well-being – expects people to base their political activities and engagements on an informed and deep understanding of political issues. Following such a vision, people are expected to be competent to act individually and engage in politics rather than only to relate shallowly to information by forming spontaneous and arbitrary political reactions. This logic forms the basis of both democratically functioning media and a capable, responsible and engaged “informed citizenship”.

As this idealized vision of the media and journalism foresees, journalism should provide a forum for public criticism and comment. Journalism is envisioned as a primary catalyst of opinion formation and participation, and this line of thinking verbalizes the classical procedure of news production, consumption and knowledge formation. Likewise, people should be active and engaged media users. They should be curious about their surrounding environments as well as about the bigger world. As citizens and media users, they should take part in public discussions about civic issues and should form an understanding about how to participate in democratic life. In short, the free flow of information about social issues, as well as equal representation and the expression of differing views, is treated as a precondition for meaningful political participation.

The above vision suggests that (a) the use of news and information and (b) participation in politics are positively correlated and that democracy’s vibrancy and vitality depend on the availability of both professional news media and sufficient means and channels for self-expression and participation (Verba & Nie, 1987). It follows that the quality and intensity of political decision making and, hence, of democracy – such as voting in elections and referenda, taking part in political consultations and deliberation or the formation of communities of interests – depend on the qualitative features of the information provided in the media (as well as on other socio-economic features, such as social standing) and on the degree of public engagement with the media and politics. However, the question arises – to what extent do the media systems in different European countries fulfil this purpose of equality and representation? Do members of the European public engage with online information environments? Do they actively comment and share their views and opinions online or, contrariwise, do they abstain from the assumed advantages of the new modes of political and civic commitment? What evidence do we have to explore further the supposed variations across European countries?

Though providing important guidelines, the normative view is indeed quite idealistic. Quite a few of the most recent studies demonstrate that intensified news

consumption hinders rather than enhances people's willingness to participate in public life (Woodstock, 2014). According to these analyses, the previously dominant and normatively shaped cycle of dependence between news and politics, and, accordingly, between representation and participation, seems to have changed. In the same way as the media system was hybridized, incorporating both conventional media channels and individualized communication options (Chadwick, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2012), and the dominant communication paradigm has shifted from mass to individualized and networked communication (Balčytienė & Wadbring, 2017; Cardoso, 2011), participatory forms and formats of politics might appear to be distorted as well. Such an opinion contradicts the conventional assumptions about news consumption as fostering civic engagement (cf. Putnam, 2000). Nonetheless, it needs to be examined, especially in a time of arising requests to rethink the perception of what is "established", that is, conventional, in contemporary political participation and to design a new directory of citizen involvement and participation actions, covering a broader spectrum of participating activities, such as "monitorial participation", "monitorial citizenship" or even "online self-expressionism", to mention a few (Davies, 2011; Grabe & Myrick, 2016; Graves, 2017; Imbrasaitė, 2012; Parvin, 2018; Schudson, 1998, 2006; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). As assumed, such an attempt would be of high significance and need, particularly in times of heightened individuality and the domination of networked communications and interactive media. Whether such a claim appears to be relevant and applicable within all political and media contexts (political and media cultures) will be explored in the next section of this study.

Citizenship and societal well-being

As stated, the idea of "citizenship" generally perceives news and information as primary catalysts for engagement and participation, indirectly implying access to information from a plurality of sources. Obviously, an informed person is one who informs him/herself on what he/she is interested in at a certain moment in time (which can be many things). Democracy needs engaged, active and contributing members. Equally, participation in communal matters and experience sharing appear to result in rewarding feelings of meaningful fulfilment, satisfaction and happiness.

Normative views, extensively examined in the academic literature, accentuate a close and mutually supporting linkage between the ideas of an informed and responsible citizenship and the quality of "daily democracy", that is, democratic life and general "societal well-being". Societal well-being is a broad concept encompassing the essential ideals of an equal and just society and appears to be among the highest priorities and concerns and the qualitative indicators of democratic life (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). As a theoretical concept, societal well-being has emerged as an indicator applied in general societal quality descriptions that extend far beyond the economic performance markers (such as the GDP, which mainly deals with matters of wealth and economic

growth). Though financial security and employment as well as good health appear to be essential attributes of welfare states and social policies in modern states, societal well-being aims to consider such components as an attractive social environment, strong and supporting relationships, involvement in communities, emotional fulfilment and happiness and the like.

The idea of well-being (also often widely labelled as the notion of a “good life”) appears to be a good point of departure for the identification of observed societal changes. We approach the idea of well-being as both a rational and an emotional state that deals not just with general happiness and life satisfaction but touches specifically on the idea of “belongingness”, explained as the human emotional need and desire for social attachment, connectivity, engagement and interpersonal trust, and thus also informal representation (i.e. a condition that might be identified through the existence of communication rights and freedoms such as the right to learn about life, the right to be included in social interaction, the right to be seen and shown, among others), which might designate active attachments to community life and involvement in decision making and processes of change of existing conditions.

Naturally, the changes in European politics identified in the introductory section of this chapter also manifest variations in publicly shared ideas of what constitutes a responsible and informed citizen. New scholarly analyses seem to suggest that the notion of an “informed citizen” no longer appears to be based on the idea of idealized determination to serve democratic ideals by actively participating in political and public life (Grabe & Myrick, 2016). As identified, contemporary social and political realities are much more complex and polarized and much less inclusive and “publicly oriented” – in other words, inequality in representation appears to be shared and widespread across the European context (Lefkofridi et al., 2012). News media and journalism, on their part, though still attempting to adhere to the classical vision of professional reporting – and, hence, freedom, equality, social inclusiveness and representation of different voices – appear to be greatly influenced by financial obstacles (profit orientation and managerialism) in the industry, while journalists themselves delve into branded communications and performativity. Citizens follow similar trends as, by actively engaging with digital networks, they implicitly remain in groups and circles of likeminded users.

In the end, in contemporary networked societies, information is produced not just to inform and represent the users but also to generate further knowledge and information. Eventually, this might have civically empowering outcomes, such as better-informed and knowledgeable citizens and skilled professionals. Contrariwise, it might contribute to audience fragmentation and disintegration and withdrawal and alienation from societal affairs. The latter tendency, regrettably, seems to be among the most plausible ones (Woodstock, 2014).

So how do Europeans perceive themselves in terms of democratic agency? Do they express feelings of contentment as well-informed and happy citizens or do they feel that their needs, interests and voices are being neglected and ignored? What types of

variations are observed across Europe? How is the perception of agency affected and transformed by the existing structural and cultural differences among the European media systems, and how do intensified information exposure and networked experiences contribute to this?

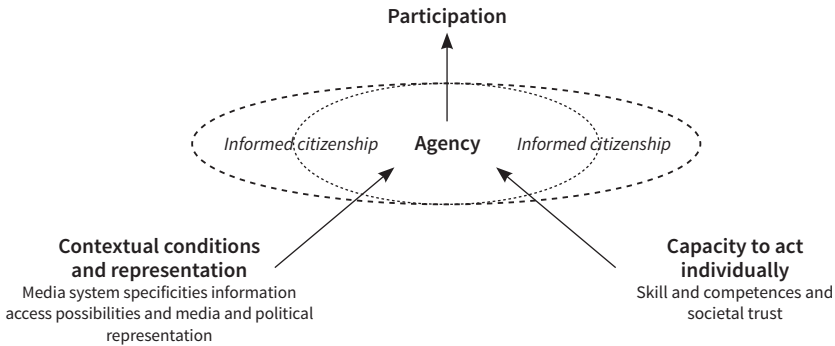
Inequality in agency across Europe

Media and information usage, in general, should be studied from the viewpoint of agency, that is, as a participatory activity and a social and political process that is shaped through both contextual conditions and individual and social practice contributing to human experience and acquired competencies for further actions (which might lead to participation and engagement in public life or withdrawal from it). In the available analyses, however, very little attention is being paid to information exposure and access as a morally charged and civic activity (cf. Silverstone, 2004). Though contemporary societies are indeed actively using varied types of both conventional media and networked communications, the question is whether such a free flow of diversified information, reaching people through mixed channels, acts as a socially inclusive arena ensuring the development of knowledgeable and engaged citizenry.

While adhering to the previously raised questions, it also needs to be remembered that the classical ideals of informed and active citizenry and democratic participation have emerged within the Western cultural tradition. These ideals were developed and sustained within reasonably fair, firm and stable (political and economic) conditions. Academic studies of democratic functioning and political and social inclusiveness also specify a strong correlation between a general sense of social justice and equality in a society, on the one hand, and engagement in political and societal affairs, on the other. Vice versa, the more socially and economically unequal and vulnerable a society is, the less politically engaged is its citizenry. Hence, bearing these arguments in mind, we wish to suggest that the defining determinants of differences (and inequality) in agency across Europe will be structured by contextual (defined by conditions for media functioning) and individual (defined by individual status, acquired social competencies and citizenship roles) issues (Figure 2).

Thus, the notion of “inequality in agency” needs to be studied in accordance with two prerequisites, namely (a) the existing (political, economic and legal) conditions of information accessibility and (b) trust, social capital and the participatory competences of the public. The latter aspect, specified here as the “capacity to act individually”, which refers to individual self-confidence, competences and social trust, will be grounded empirically in the following section.

Figure 2. Agency context and the building of participatory skills and competences



Digitized encounters with social reality

Conventional news media are still observed as a core pillar and social institution of contemporary democracies. However, it needs to be acknowledged that today’s news and information environments have been significantly hybridized, functioning on multiple logics and serving different goals (Chadwick, 2013). The exceptionality of contemporary information environments materializes in several aspects. Information exchanges and communication are sustained through various mechanisms of individualized reach, production, manipulation and distribution of information across multiple mediums and platforms. The digitalization of content supplied with novel technological affordances permits access to and integration of various thematic areas, ranging from institutional information and scientifically verified data to amateur expression and communication. Shifting communication paradigms – from the mode of transmission and control to the mode of self-expression and networking – naturally enhance the appearance of more individualized and grassroots, participatory and deliberative modes of communication (Balčytienė & Wadbring, 2017; Cardoso, 2011). New ICTs have the potential to determine the character and amount of social contact that people have, influencing, as noted, the quality and nature of their communication within the society.

There are studies suggesting that the use of social media can decrease social exclusion, increase participation and in other ways contribute to dynamic societal processes (Ellison et al., 2014). These studies advocate that having access to digital devices and social networks contributes to social connectivity, creates new learning possibilities, raises career opportunities and, along with this, positively contributes to social well-being and other qualitative improvements in societal and political life. Still, as previously identified, these many assertions have already been challenged. Rather than functioning as arenas in which different interests meet and visions are consolidated, the algorithmic logic of most networks acts as a factor that contributes to polarization and societal disintegration (Brandtzaeg, 2012; Tsatsou, 2011). The ongoing

shifts and transformations experienced in the European conventional media sphere as well as the surrounding interactive digital environments result in ongoing societal re-configurations and regroupings that suggest new forms of communalization and identity formation through the use of alternative, semi-alternative or niche channels. In such a context, naturally, new modes of citizenship and social responsiveness are expected to arise. Do people feel more empowered by these new techniques? What variations of political engagement are detected in different countries in Europe? What are the main obstacles to more engaging political practices?

The fact that socio-economic stratification factors are closely related to inequality in political participation is a classical issue (Jottier & Heyndels, 2012; Verba & Nie, 1987; Verba et al., 1978, 1995, 2003). By applying the notion of “inequality in agency”, we would like to argue the following: although all of these aspects of societal stratification (such as those imposed by age, gender and various socio-economic factors) remain in digitized encounters with information and participation, more nuanced ingredients, based on information and representation inequalities as well as variations in individual competencies and feelings, contribute to the rise of political participatory inequality and shifts in political life in contemporary Europe.

Empirical evidence from the European Social Survey Round 8 (2016) shows different patterns of online engagement and political participation in selected European countries, including both old and young democracies (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK). As can be seen, political engagement in online interactions is correlated with the level of democracy and inclusiveness of the political system. In countries and regions with higher levels of transparency, accountability and responsiveness, citizens are more active on online political platforms. For instance, supportive democratic regimes of the Nordic countries encourage citizens to exploit alternative practices for political participation and representation more actively. Conversely, the lack of representativeness and inclusiveness of political systems in the central-eastern and southern parts of Europe does not evolve into participatory action but rather leads to isolation and withdrawal from political and public life (Figure 3). The existing structural barriers are also linked to the individual capacities, self-confidence, supporting communal ties and emotional well-being of citizens. As demonstrated, younger democracies are challenged by the lack of confidence and skills among their citizens to engage in meaningful online participation (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Political engagement and interactions in online media by the inclusiveness of the political system (ESS08, 2016)²

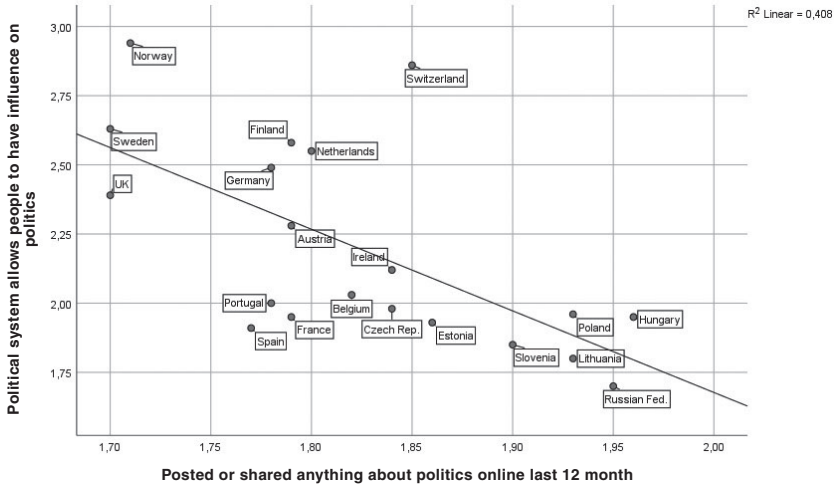
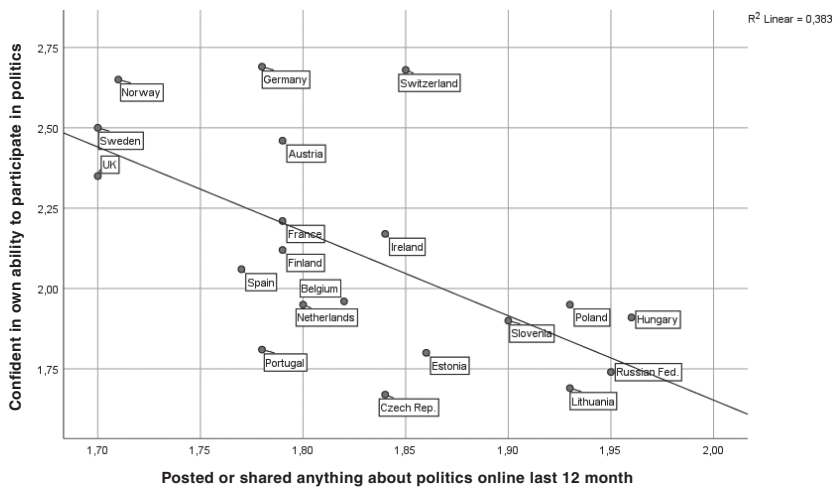


Figure 4. Political engagement and interactions in online media by confidence in one’s own ability to participate in politics (ESS08, 2016)³

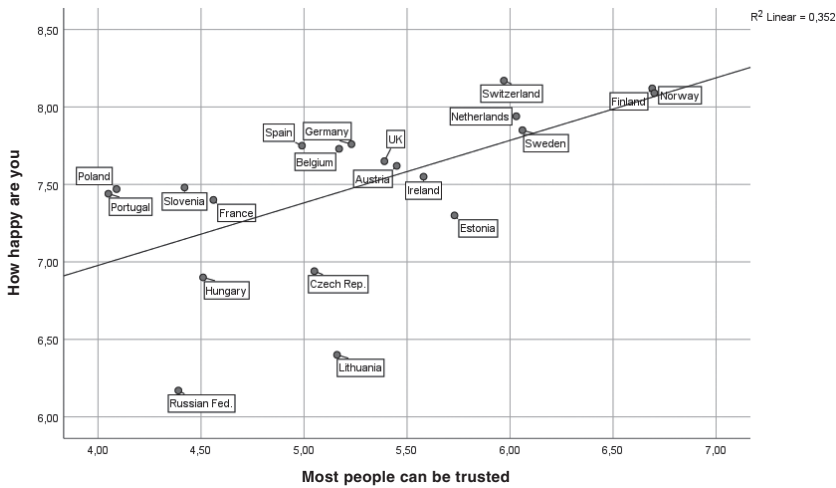


2. Political engagement in online media was measured through the following question: “During the last 12 months, have you posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter?” The possible responses were 1, meaning “yes”, and 2, meaning “no”. The inclusiveness of the political system was measured using the statement that the “political system allows people to have an influence on politics”. The responses were recorded on a 5-point scale, where 1 denotes “not at all”, 2 “very little”, 3 “some”, 4 “a lot” and 5 “a great deal”.
3. Political engagement in online media was measured through the following question: “During the last 12 months, have you posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter?” The possible responses were 1, meaning “yes”, and 2, meaning “no”. Confidence in one’s own ability to participate in politics was measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for “not at all confident”, 2 for “a little confident”, 3 for “quite confident”, 4 for “very confident” and 5 for “completely confident”.

Based on these illustrations, we claim that, despite the fact that, in formal terms, political equality has been institutionalized across Europe, its effective use clearly appears to be stratified. In addition, online modes and techniques appear to have no major influence here – limited engagement in real life translates into reduced online interactions. Apart from the global world trends of growing inequalities, polarization and uncertainties, younger European democracies have been struggling with the cultural and structural challenges for democracy and welfare development, including a lack of social and institutional trust, disenchantment with the political establishment, civil rights and legacy media. These challenges are also evident when using alternative means of accessing information and media.

Broadly speaking, scepticism and disappointment with the established political structures dominate across Europe, a trait that is further supplemented with an absence of satisfaction, happiness and emotional well-being (Figure 5), a lack of social integration and interpersonal trust (see Figure 6) correlated with general feelings of powerlessness and unequal representation (Figure 7).

Figure 5. Social trust by personal feelings of happiness (ESS08, 2016)⁴



4. Social trust was measured through the question “Would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The responses were provided on a 10-point scale, where 0 refers to “you can’t be too careful” and 10 refers to “most people can be trusted”. Personal feelings of happiness were measured through a question that asked “How satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?” The answers were recorded on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 stands for “extremely dissatisfied” and 10 stands for “extremely satisfied”.

Figure 6. Social trust by satisfaction with democracy (ESS08, 2016)⁵

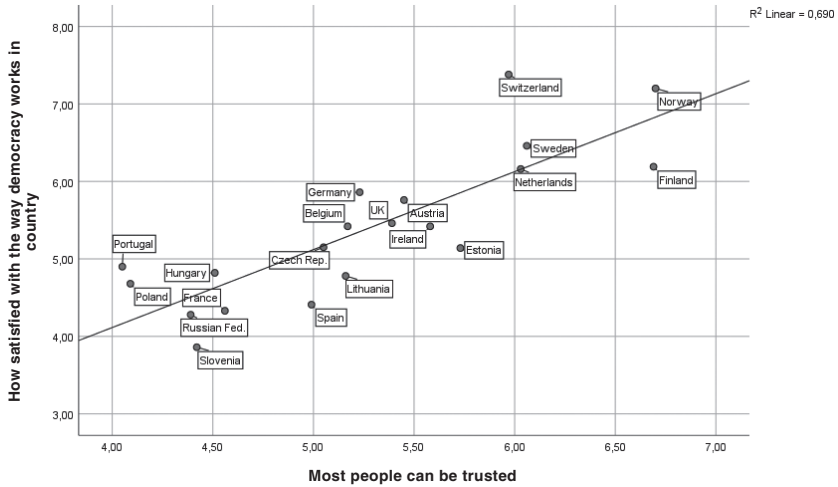
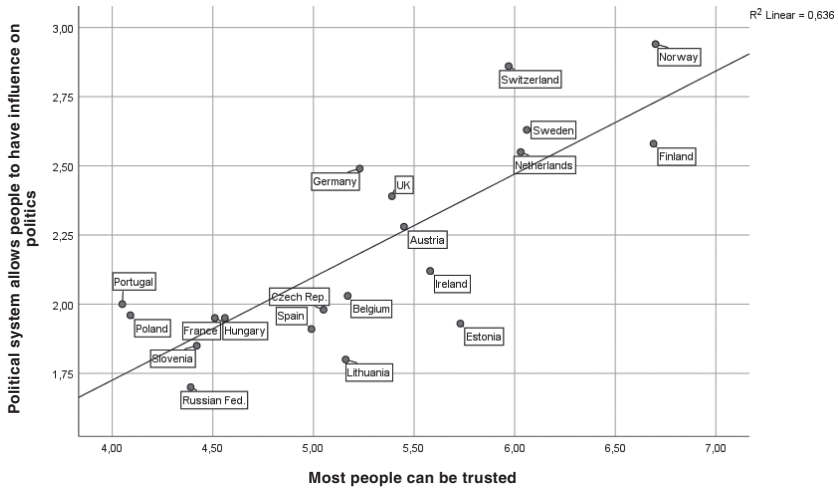


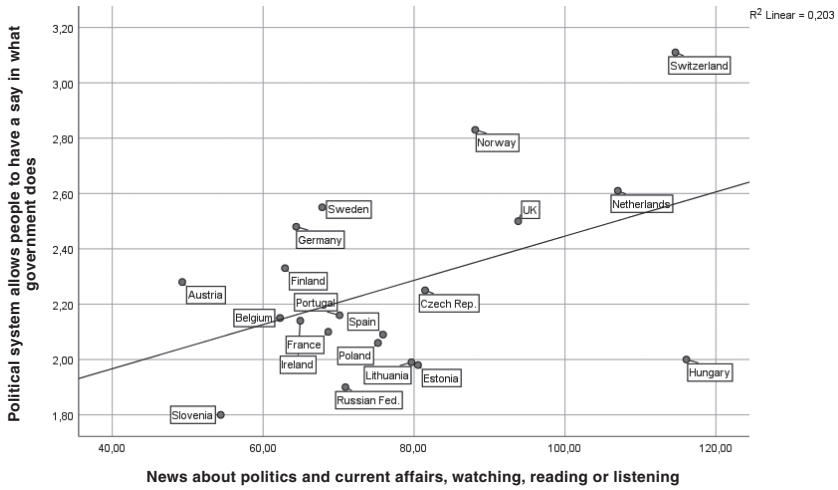
Figure 7. Social trust by the inclusiveness of the political system (ESS08, 2016)⁶



- Satisfaction with democracy was measured through a question that asked “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the country?” The answers were recorded on a 10-point scale, where 0 stands for “extremely dissatisfied” and 10 stands for “extremely satisfied”. Social trust was measured through the question “Would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The responses were provided on a 10-point scale, where 0 refers to “you can’t be too careful” and 10 refers to “most people can be trusted”.
- Social trust was measured through the question “Would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The responses were provided on a 10-point scale, where 0 refers to “you can’t be too careful” and 10 refers to “most people can be trusted”. The inclusiveness of the political system was measured using the statement that the “political system allows people to have an influence on politics”. The responses were provided on a 5-point scale, where 1 means “not at all”, 2 “very little”, 3 “some”, 4 “a lot” and 5 “a great deal”.

As seen in Figure 8, exposure to political news and information is also more pronounced in the established democracies of Western and especially Northern Europe rather than the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Russia. Due to the less supportive political environment, citizens of the latter group of countries rely less on both conventional and alternative media sources.

Figure 8. Political news consumption by the inclusiveness of the political system (ESS08, 2016)⁷



The empirical trends identified support the conventional arguments that social and economic inequality translates into rising participatory inequality in political life, such as marginalized conventional engagement in politics. Furthermore, a lack of representation in both state and elite-oriented politics as well as legacy media lead to public disaffection with political life and media coverage, while broader representations of different voices in society significantly increase political efficacy (Curran, 2014). With a few exceptions, we can identify regions of Central and Eastern Europe where these trends are proliferating even more due to the lack of supporting cultural and structural conditions, which are contributing to the increasing divide and inequalities between established and new democracies.

7. Political news consumption was measured through the question “On a typical day, about how much time do you spend watching, reading or listening to news about politics and current affairs?”, answered in hours and minutes. Political inclusiveness was measured via the statement that the “political system allows people to have an influence on politics”. The responses were provided on a 5-point scale, where 1 means “not at all”, 2 “very little”, 3 “some”, 4 “a lot” and 5 “a great deal”.

Trust, social capital and participatory competences

As noted, media usage, communication and interactions have intensified and increased noticeably in all European countries. However, whether such practices are working in favour of informed citizenry and quality of democracy appears to be questionable. Traditionally, civic life is characterized by civic engagement, political equality, solidarity, trust and tolerance and a strong associational life. The density of civic life rests on interpersonal trust and social capital, which is composed of social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from those networks.

People form and cultivate communities on the basis of shared ideas and values. The media, generally, have always been (and, in many ways, still are) treated as a means for cultivating and exposing societal dialogues and indirectly bringing people and the nation together. As implied earlier, the media do not just transfer information but also build strong emotional ties between citizens. These ties affect the connection that the citizens feel with one another as well as with the whole society and the country. As Benedict Anderson (1983), referring to the classical meaning of print media and communications, explains:

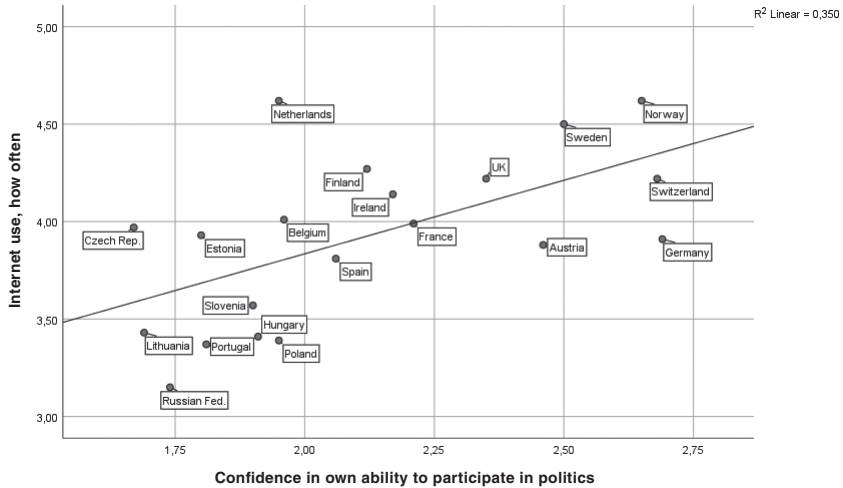
The novel and the newspaper were seen as technical means and potential to represent the nation as an imagined community living in homogeneous time. Millions of individuals might interact with one another, but they share, by virtue of their participation in the mediated culture, a common experience and a collective memory. (Anderson, 1983: 24-25)

It could be rather straightforward to transfer such an idea to social networks. However, there are also a number of drawbacks to such an approach. To be informed, people need access to verified information, which is news. However, different people have different preferences for news. Since not all published news is reliable, people need adequate resources, such as confidence, knowledge and skills, to guide their news selections. In social networks, communication revolves around “mass self-communication” preferences, that is, the wants and desires of the individual user (Castells, 2013). Hence, the framing of the online political identity of different users is shaped by their activities, that is, their roles – that of passive follower and spontaneous consumer and that of active user and content producer and distributor. As a result, in such – networked – communications, the guidance, support and mentorship ideally provided by the mentoring of professional journalism appear to be lost.

Though the inequality between European states with regard to access to digital networks and their various uses (facilitated through e-business, e-government, e-learning and other services) is slowly diminishing, there are still clear differences among richer and less economically affluent nations. As noted in comparative analyses (Cernison & Ostling, 2017), the variation in the median income can explain the variation in both digital skills and regular internet use. In other words, there is a clear correlation between the (economic) wealth of the country and the promotion of information and communication policies and practices in media education. To be more specific, people

in high-income countries tend to know the digital environment better and use the internet more; they also express high levels of confidence in democracy in general as well as in their own ability to take part in politics (see Figure 9).

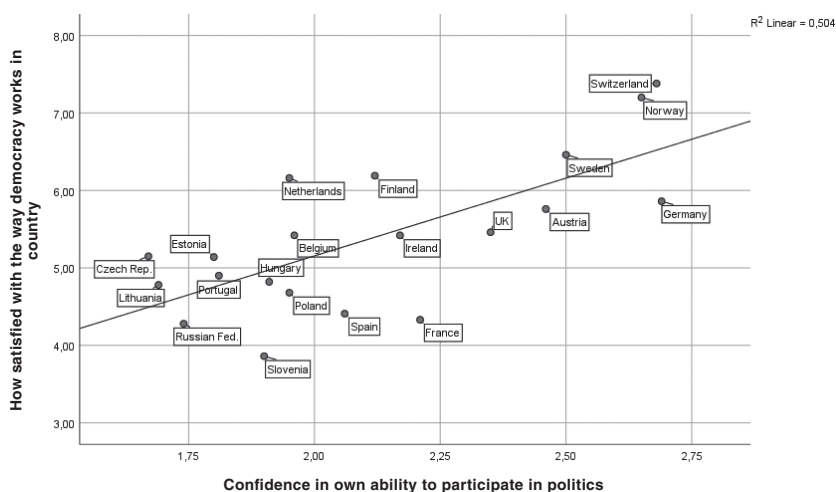
Figure 9. Confidence in one’s own ability to participate in politics through internet use (ESS08, 2016)⁸



As stated earlier, politically informed citizens are essential for democracy, yet conventional media use and traditional news consumption are experiencing a steady decline across Europe. Despite the growing availability and intensity of daily usage of the internet in news consumption, becoming an assured, familiarized, informed and accustomed citizen is not self-evident. In addition, as shown by public perceptions (Figure 10), there is an increase in general uncertainty regarding people’s self-confidence in their own abilities to participate in politics, especially in the younger European democracies.

8. Confidence in one’s own ability to participate in politics was measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not at all confident”, 2 “a little confident”, 3 “quite confident”, 4 “very confident” and 5 “completely confident”. The use of the internet was defined by asking the question: “People can use the internet on different devices, such as computers, tablets and smartphones. How often do you use the internet on these or any other devices, whether for work or personal use?” The responses were provided on a 5-point scale, where 1 denotes “never”, 2 “only occasionally”, 3 “a few times a week”, 4 “most days” and 5 “every day”.

Figure 10. Confidence in one’s own ability to participate in politics by satisfaction with democracy (ESS08, 2016)⁹

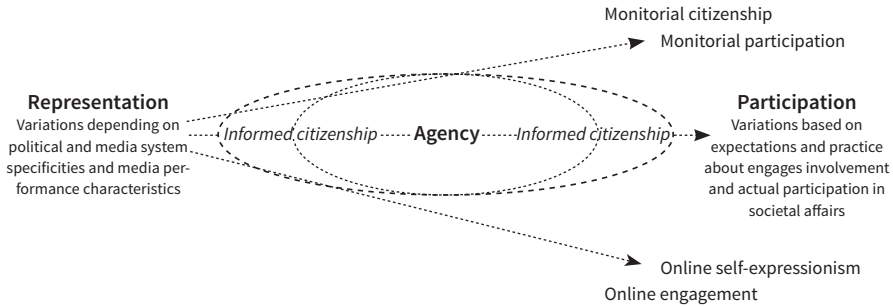


The trends identified in the above illustrations (Figures 9 and 10) propose contrasting public perceptions of democratic performance and political engagement across Europe. The countries with liberal democratic traditions (older European democracies) demonstrate stronger support for citizens’ involvement in public and political life, while, in other countries (in Central and Eastern Europe), the lack of a favourable political culture and civil society traditions, as well as dominating uncertainty and distrust, creates a problem of increasing alienation and disengagement from both formal and informal political activities, such as voting, involvement in associations and citizens’ groups, demonstrating, volunteering, accessing information and using political news.

This outcome indeed challenges the previously asserted plausibility (see Figure 11) about the potentially engaging and civically empowering character of new participatory channels in socially varied contexts.

In conclusion, what is observed here is that, among the most significant outcomes of changes in information access and use in different countries in Europe, there are changes in political identity formation and (informed) democratic participation, that is, political and civic agency. To boost meaningful participation in political and public matters, the development of citizen agency is of paramount importance for sustainable democracy.

9. Confidence in one’s own ability to participate in politics was measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not at all confident”, 2 “a little confident”, 3 “quite confident”, 4 “very confident” and 5 “completely confident”. The question “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the country?” was answered on a 10-point scale, where 0 stands for “extremely dissatisfied” and 10 stands for “extremely satisfied”.

Figure 11. Variations in representations, agency and participation

Democratic agency and multiple voices

In this section, we would like to summarize some of the core arguments outlined in the previous sections of the chapter. In general, equality in agency appears to be a key detector of an accessible, plural and participative society as well as an inclusive and responsive media system. We used the notion of “inequality in agency”, which addresses not only the issue of access to information, inclusiveness and representation and plurality of the views exchanged (which also refers to the existing conditions for media operation) but also strongly emphasizes the issue of skills and competencies (as well as the levels of social trust) needed by citizens to enjoy fundamental communication rights fully (such as freedom of access to information and communication, the ability to appreciate professional news journalism and the capacity to express one’s vision and ideas and communicate in safe informational exchanges).

Essentially, the abundance of new media and information sources requires new competencies and skills from all media users. Increasing concern about cybersecurity, fake news, information operations, psychological wars and opinion strategic narratives are threatening young and old democracies and lead to the need for a critical and analytical understanding of different media-related processes, including news making, discourses and effects. To be able to act and participate in an information-saturated environment, one needs specific skills and competences to navigate complex and permanently changing technological networks and media applications. For citizens who are estranged from political life, resources of active citizenship, including social capital, a sense of citizenship and civic infrastructure, are necessary to encourage their capacity and willingness to participate in democratic politics and to reverse the deepening participatory inequalities.

Conclusion and policy implications

This analysis, generally, centred on a clearly identified conflict between the expansion of possibilities to acquire knowledge about varied societal and political issues,

on the one hand, and fluctuating public participation, engagement and commitment to collective issues and communal matters, on the other (Grabe & Myrick, 2016). As such, this study attempted to take the first step towards the classification of European democracies from the perspective of news and information usage and perceived self-confidence in individual political and civic abilities.

News and media play a decisive role by informing people and enabling them to make sound (democratic) decisions. Though it might be the case that digital communications are more flexible and open to intervention on the part of all members of society than more traditional media, as demonstrated here, it is indeed questionable whether they are more inclusive or collectively empowering.

The normative perspective envisions communication as a prerequisite for informed and active citizenship and participation in political life, leading to logical and informed political choices. As shown in this chapter, the reality appears to be more complex than the idealized visions imply. In digitized, networked and hybridized news and information environments that mostly function as user-centred media channels, the function of responsible usage, connection and relationship building appears to be the responsibility of the audience. As explored here, the ability to assume that responsibility does not automatically emerge in parallel with new techniques but requires proper contextual conditions, for example strengthening the competencies of individual users and encouraging objective, professional journalism. As revealed, some Europeans already master this competence and actively engage in networked communications in which they are inclined to enjoy their fundamental rights fully, such as freedom of expression and access to information. Though people actively use media and ICTs and access information through countless channels, their political choices are questionable from a normative perspective on democracy, and the effects on an ostensibly democratic way of life are quite controversial: support for democratic institutions is decreasing, and voting rates are in decline. People's knowledge of political issues is also debatable; they consistently express discontent and dissatisfaction and doubt their capabilities for meaningful political participation. Therefore, these tendencies need to be addressed on national as well as European policy levels, promoting democratic values of freedom of information, diversity, representation and participation.

To conclude, digitization and networked communications cause serious effects and democratically significant reconfigurations in all European countries. As shown, the availability of information and appropriate conditions for communication and relationship building appear to be significant influencers in this process. The capacity to access and use information is among the key determinants of equality and social inclusion in emerging knowledge societies. How these rights are being applied in reality, however, varies across different European countries.

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Chapter 16

Towards a policy for digital capitalism?

Werner A. Meier

Democratic states and their respective civil societies face extraordinary difficulties in formulating and enforcing policies against leading transnational corporations. Social scientists, too, find it difficult to incorporate the diversity of new challenges into the national and global debate from a comprehensive perspective. This chapter is the result of scrutinizing the risks and challenges of platform and surveillance capitalism and the way in which the different forms of digital capitalism shape social and societal changes from a political-economic macro-perspective. A list of topics for future research and policy fields requiring action concludes the chapter.

From the very beginning, digital structural change and its consequences for the public and society were discussed as controversial in the media and in communication science (DiMaggio et al., 2001). While the so-called *cyber-euphorics* emphasized above all the positive effects of the internet, such as easy and inexpensive access to a vast amount of information, more interactivity and greater participation for all, the so-called *cyber-sceptics* tried to find answers to questions of unequal access to the internet. This applies in particular to socially and educationally disadvantaged social classes but also to certain groups, such as old or vulnerable people who are dependent on social support or those with a migration background.

However, the basic problems raised in this book cannot be addressed with a multitude of micro-studies. Rather, the structural frameworks and actors that are responsible for the political, economic, cultural and social institutionalization of media technologies and services should be analysed in more detail.

For more than 20 years, business and politics have been accepting and promoting an entrepreneurial and state-concerted commodification of legacy media, platforms and services. This commodification has led to new conditions of exploitation, instead of the liberation of dependencies. Access to capital and resources determines how and to what ends new technologies and services are developed and institutionalized on proprietary platforms or networks. Technologies of freedom, emancipation, control and exploitation develop together with the dominant market structures and political

Meier, Werner A. (2019). Towards a policy for digital capitalism? in Josef Trappel (ed.) *Digital media inequalities: Policies against divides, distrust and discrimination*, pp. 265-284. Göteborg: Nordicom.

power relations. The expansion and the closing of the digital divide are the expression and consequence of confrontations within the framework of digital and global capitalism, which will be discussed in the second section of this chapter. This also includes the governmental and multilateral efforts in media, platform and data policy, which are discussed in the third section of the chapter.

Structural features of digital capitalism

Already 20 years ago, the American media communication scholar Dan Schiller dealt with the emergence of digital capitalism in the US. Applying a political–economic perspective in his book *Digital capitalism* (1999), he expressed scepticism about the rampant promises flooding cyberspace. Schiller claimed that this new network was quickly colonized by the dominant, neoliberal market structures. Computer and telecommunication networks were in the process of completely interlocking with the existing hypercapitalism to expand massively the effective reach of the markets. The internet represented the central production and control apparatus of an increasingly transnationalized market system and played a leading role in the globalization of the capitalist economy. This would expand the social and cultural spheres of influence of digital capitalism as never before (Schiller, 1999: xiv). According to Schiller, this transformation above all strengthens transnational corporations while at the same time exacerbating the existing social and societal disparities.

In the same year, Peter Glotz, a professor of media and communication science at the University of St. Gallen, wrote a book entitled *Die beschleunigte Gesellschaft. Kulturkämpfe im digitalen Kapitalismus* [Accelerating society. Cultural battles in digital capitalism]. Based on the American economic consultant and bestselling author Tom Tapscott, Glotz (1999) assumes that capitalism will be turned upside down by the basic innovations of telematics. Digital capitalism is greatly shaped by the systematic, market-logical exploitation of information and technologies. The most important basic tendencies of this digital society are the acceleration of processes of all kinds and globalization. They manifest themselves in the rapidly growing economic interdependence and communicative networking. The power of the nation states dwindles, and the cultural dominance of Europe ends (Glotz, 1999: 96). The power in the new digital society lies with half a per cent of asset owners and their employed top management. This ruling class asserts itself against a new army of analysts who sustain digital capitalism. For them, digital capitalism brings a further increase in labour productivity, specifically further acceleration, flexibilization and internationalization of labour (ibid.: 131). The lower classes will be excluded from potential benefits. These include the unemployed, welfare recipients, the homeless, low-income pensioners as well as young people without a training place – the “working poor” – and many women. With the marginalization of losers in the network society, however, the “third tier” of relegated and excluded persons is constantly growing. Glotz feared that the informa-

tion and knowledge gap would be reinforced by digital technologies, that a two-class society would emerge and that this society would additionally be promoted (Glotz, 1999: 227): the development triggered by digitalization would inevitably lead to a division of society into an elite that would willingly participate in the high (working) pace and a new lower class that would feed itself to a large extent from drop-outs and those left behind. It is neither likely nor in sight that this class division can be mitigated by a corresponding technology, media and education policy is, according to Glotz. The market forces are too strong and the social policy alternatives too weak.

The third author to deal with “digital or informational capitalism” was Manuel Castells, a sociologist who teaches in California. According to his 1999 study, *The rise of the network society*, this variant of capitalism is characterized by the fact that, under the revolutionary conditions of the new information technology, the productivity of the economy depends on the production, processing and application of information. This informatization of economy and society takes place globally and facilitates the network society. Out of the crisis of capitalism, an informational, global, hypercapitalist mode of production develops on the basis of new information and communication technologies. Knowledge production, communication and information processing are the most important sources in informational capitalism. Predominantly global companies, including media groups with their corporate networks, are outstanding and at the same time powerful actors in informational capitalism (Castells, 2009).

On the basis of these three authors, the central structural features of digital capitalism can be summarized as follows:

- Information and communication technologies are produced, marketed and exploited as central raw materials, resources and commodities by transnational corporations.
- The way in which the production, distribution and consumption of information and communication technologies are institutionalized on the internet has far-reaching consequences for societal development.
- Digital capitalism is responsible for the continuing dominance and productivity of globalized market economic structures.
- In particular, the world’s leading technology companies are restructuring sluggish capitalism by efficiently and effectively processing knowledge, data, communications and information.
- The productivity of digital capitalism is based on the systematic commodification of new products, services and human labour.
- Commodification has expansive and invasive tendencies, especially in the context of deregulation and privatization.

With the emergence of the so-called “new media”, leading American technology groups have moved into the centre of the debate on digital capitalism. According to

Jody Dean (2005, 2015), a form of informational “communicative capitalism” has developed alongside the long-institutionalized media capitalism. This form of digital capitalism is primarily made possible by the quickly emerging social media, dominated by Facebook. In concrete terms, communicative capitalism refers to “a specific form of late capitalism in which the central values of bourgeois democracy are materialized in networked communication technologies” (ibid.). According to Dean, values and ideals, such as “accessibility, inclusion, open discussion and participation”, are increasingly being displaced by the expropriation and exploitation of communicative processes; capital uses communication for its own purposes. In this reading, social media turn out to be “exploitation networks”. In communicative capitalism, they write the success stories.

Shoshana Zuboff deals more critically with the marketing of data obtained through systematic monitoring as practised by technology companies. Zuboff speaks of a completely new subspecies of capitalism, as the breathtaking profits would come from one-sided monitoring and changing human behaviour. Further, Zuboff (2016) reports an exploitative relationship among big data corporations, because these corporations will transform our data into fabulous profits without being asked. Data about where we are, where we go, how we drive and how we feel about it will be marketed mercilessly. Moreover, in addition to selling the data, the companies are concerned with directly influencing human behaviour: changing it in a certain direction and turning it into business. The chief data scientist of a much-admired Silicon Valley company that develops applications to improve student learning explains it as follows:

The goal is to change people’s actual behavior. When people use our app, we can capture their behavior, identify good and bad behavior, and develop ways to reward the good and punish the bad. We can test how implementable our clues and instructions are to them and how profitable they are to us. (ibid.)

Surveillance capitalism

According to Zuboff, surveillance capitalism is practised by a few corporations and exploits the almost unregulated cyberspace and the invasive forces of the internet as sources of capital formation and profit maximization. Furthermore, surveillance capitalism exploits the dependent and submissive users of platforms, who are seldom in a position to understand the elaborated approach of the corporations in charge. The rapid accumulation of capital and the rapid institutionalization make *surveillance capitalism* the standard model of market capitalism. What then is the economic logic of this surveillance capitalism? First, it is the constant search for ever more users, channels, platforms, services, devices, places and spaces for access to data about the current and future behaviour of the people with the greatest purchasing power. It is the users who, free of charge, with more or less effort, make the raw material available to the corporations. Secondly, big data corporations are constantly working on

optimizing their highly developed and exclusive algorithms through the use of artificial intelligence and data science. Thirdly, the companies convert the current data analysis into predictive products to be sold on a meta-market. Fourthly, the more the companies manage to make their products controllable and predictable, the greater the group's sales and profits will be.

Summarizing the consequences of surveillance capitalism, Zuboff considers the concerted and concentrated attack on the control of human behaviour to represent:

- A threat to the modern liberal order and markets;
- An attack on the principles and practices of self-determination;
- A parasitic form of profit maximization: users are plundered, exploited and enslaved;
- A new dimension of social inequality by redistributing techniques, capital and rights;
- An antidemocratically institutionalized network that operates without democratic control over rights and regulation.

Platform capitalism

While Zuboff charges her concept with concentrated criticism, the Canadian social scientist Nick Srnicek (2017) formulates his observations on the transformation of capitalism since the financial crisis 10 years ago far more distantly. For Srnicek, the economy in combination with digital information technologies has produced a capitalism platform, intended to ensure new economic growth and the vitality of classic industrial sectors. With the implementation and dominance of this new business model, new forms of exploitation in the professional field emerge on markets and in new forms of capital accumulation. Srnicek presents five different types of platforms, namely advertising platforms (e.g. Facebook), cloud platforms (e.g. Amazon Web Services (AWS)), industrial platforms (e.g. Microsoft), product platforms (e.g. Spotify) and lean platforms (e.g. Uber). This information, however, appears to be academic, because the platforms of the dominant corporations, above all Amazon, are active in several sectors at the same time. When the author writes that Google and Facebook built the first “data extraction platforms” (ibid.: 64), naming and demarcation seem more random and interchangeable. What remains is the realization that “the platform has become an increasingly dominant form of corporate organization in order to monopolize, extract, analyze, use and sell this data” (ibid.: 88). The most important platforms not only invest in the construction of large infrastructures and in their own entrepreneurial capacities but also buy other up-and-coming companies on a large scale. An analysis of digital capitalism needs to consider the monopolistic tendencies of these platforms, and their effects on the wider economy as well as on society as a whole must be taken into account (ibid.: 92).

This extraordinary position of the leading platforms is a source of economic and political power. However, the quest for more and more data has a dangerous consequence: invasions of privacy are turned into profit, which is logically necessary and a characteristic of the system. According to Srnicek, the data hunger of the platforms means that these companies are constantly expanding their business activities. This leads not only to growing concerns regarding data protection but also to dynamic entrepreneurial expansion. The members of the mighty GAFA group (Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple) cannot be satisfied with their core businesses but continuously have to expand their data and constantly transfer their extraction apparatus into new areas. However, as the major platforms expand into new markets and areas, the competition will intensify and a more aggressive approach can be expected. Each platform strives for absolute dominance beyond its own core business. As a result, the chances that the possible competition, ranging from the state to alternative platform cooperatives, will be able to challenge the already established monopolies are rapidly decreasing.

The American internet theorist Evgeny Morozov (2017) criticizes this viewpoint and refuses to see digital capitalism as a new form of wealth accumulation. For him, the distinction between digital capitalism and highly financed capitalism makes no sense. He draws attention to the fact that, on the one hand, the technology group Apple is the number one in the private bond business and, on the other hand, the money that flows into the technology economy predominantly comes from banking circles and financial institutions. For example, large sections of the Norwegian population would benefit enormously from the fact that the state asset fund holds so many shares in US technology companies (*ibid.*: 93). Financial investors, pension funds and sovereign wealth funds expect high returns, enabling the five American companies Apple, Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Facebook to achieve an increase in market value of roughly 950 billion US dollars in the first ten months of 2017 alone (*ibid.*: 94). Morozov understands the digital economy as a mixture of financial capitalism and technological capitalism and highlights three shortcomings in the current notions of digital capitalism.

First, digital capitalism tends to be presented as something new and unique that has emerged from the technological revolution's immanent development over the past 20 years. This assessment is related to an inability to locate digital capitalism in the overall picture of the crisis of contemporary capitalism. The crisis is presented as salutary: as a solution to all problems that have not yet been solved adequately (*ibid.*: 97). Secondly, the business model of digital capitalism is considered to be too static. In the case of Google and Facebook, for example, people think that it is ultimately advertising that keeps it going – advertising revenue that then finances a variety of free services. The increasing financialization of the economy has produced a multitude of services using digital technologies and algorithms that can be used cost-effectively by many people. Few highly profitable corporations subsidize and guarantee the growing offer. These corporations combine the provision of these services with the provision

of advertising space, which they then sell to third parties (ibid.: 98). For Morozov, a large part of the digital economy, currently secured mainly by the advertising business, will not last in the long run (ibid.: 99). The leading technology groups see themselves as being in a position to consider the transition to a different business model due to the constantly accumulating amounts of data. In all these companies – according to Morozov – services connected with artificial intelligence (AI) will sooner or later take centre stage. Already today, the provision of storage space, computing power or application software via the internet plays an important role for all tech groups. Morozov notes that much higher profit rates can be achieved in this area than with the dominant business model of advertising. As a result, we have to realize that we may already be about to leave the era of primarily advertising-linked digital capitalism. These new dependencies on digital monopoly capitalism were only made possible by the release of huge amounts of financial capital, with the help of state funds. Thirdly, digital capitalism is treated much too sparingly instead of demanding more structural, legislative intervention. We should not be capricious about dealing with data protection problems and the protection of privacy but imagine that, in the future, four American and four Chinese corporations could dominate the entire AI scene. We should take note, Morozov warns, that in 2016 Amazon spent about 13 billion US dollars and Google 11-12 billion US dollars on research and development (ibid.: 102).

Inequality through network power

A few Internet platforms, usually institutionalized as businesses, control the neuralgic interfaces and switches on the internet, and dominate the global markets that have emerged as a result of that control. According to Savary (2017: 23-24), these include e-commerce companies that sell their own or third-party products via the internet and platforms that produce, collect and/or provide information or offer and execute services via the internet, including social networks that bring buyers and sellers together. Such companies are not simply high-turnover commercial enterprises but first and foremost the new super-companies and mega-corporations of digitization, globalization, commercialization and monopolization. They alone dominate platform development and control individual markets, without the state and civil society even coming close to being able or willing to play an active role in shaping the development impulses, consequences and risks emanating from these corporations. How could it happen that a conglomerate of global corporations, small in number but extremely powerful, has been able to influence the economic and social order and constantly change the balance of power in their favour for years? The risks and conflicts arising from the advance of the megacorporations have been apparent for some time now. Before returning to this, let me describe the current state of affairs.

- For Alphabet, the advertising business surrounding the search engine Google, the video service Youtube and millions of websites of partner companies is still a kind of licence to print money. Google Search offers its worldwide clientele

the services of an online search engine free of charge and has them paid for by other customers who are interested in being found or in attracting the attention of searching consumers. In the US, Google Search has a market share of over 80 per cent (Statista, Dec. 2017), followed by Bing and Yahoo, which lag far behind. In Europe, 90 per cent of all search queries are made through Google. In Switzerland, Google Search even has a market share of 94 per cent, followed by Bing (4%) and Yahoo (2%).

- Almost two-thirds of advertising revenues goes to Google or Facebook via smartphones. Google and Facebook account for 70 per cent of internet data traffic. In 2017, Google claimed around 42 per cent and Facebook 21 per cent of the digital advertising market in the US for themselves. These two network giants account for 63 per cent of the digital advertising market. Chinese competitors (Alibaba, Baidu and Tencent) follow with a share of around 10 per cent.
- In 2016 and 2017, Facebook made the biggest profit in its history. In the US, Facebook controls mobile communication services. Around 77 per cent of all conversations take place in the Facebook environment (including Instagram and Whatsapp). According to the advertising company Borrell Associates, Facebook earned around 1.4 billion dollars through political advertisements in the last US election campaign. In North America, every single Facebook user of the approximately 184 million (US and CA) generated around \$27 per quarter in 2017, while in Europe 3 times less can be earned per user.
- Amazon Web Services has a market share in the cloud business of around 65 per cent and operates with huge economies of scale, which is why only Microsoft and Google can compete with it. Amazon offers over 100 services that are constantly being expanded. The cloud business accounts for only 10 per cent of the group's turnover but with the latest quarterly profit of \$1.2 billion. The services are so attractive for the customers that enormous dependencies are accepted. In addition, Amazon manages 65 per cent of online book retailing and has become the world's largest online retailer but is now also operating supermarkets. The trend towards diversification and the establishment of new business areas is continuing. Amazon in particular is expanding old ones and constantly building new ones.

Unimpeded growth of quasi-monopolies

After these impressive figures, the aim is to identify some first trends. The four quasi-monopolies GAFA (Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple) together control almost everything related to online advertising, communication and e-commerce. These companies are growing at a breathtaking pace, with revenue growth of 30-50 per cent and equally high quarterly profit margins. The remaining competition achieves single-digit growth rates at best. The world's leading companies in the digital business

are not limiting their entrepreneurial activities to individual industries or sectors but are constantly expanding their business areas through investments of their exorbitant earnings and company takeovers; they have such financial strength that they can buy or copy what seems dangerous to them. “Silicon Valley venture capitalists don’t believe they can succeed against these platforms. If newcomers nevertheless succeed, they are simply bought up and integrated by the colossuses. There is no free market for social media platforms” (Tagesanzeiger, 2018).

Unequal power relations

As a result of these unequal market conditions, the market leader cannot be held in check by competition but constantly expands its dominance through network effects. The entrepreneurial dominance of social media platforms, based on ownership and American dominance in the field of ICT, promotes oligarchization and, consequently, further inequality.

Highly commercial platforms

Few social media platforms are controlled by their members or users. Almost all of them are dominated by a single company (regardless of the goals of these organizations). The ownership concentration rate is even higher than in the telecom sector or in the legacy media sector. With the exception of Wikipedia, all companies operate on a highly commercial basis and try to secure their strong economic position politically.

Structuring through soft power

At first sight, such platforms offer almost only advantages. They also enjoy great popularity. The hurdles to becoming part of this constantly growing community of old and new friends are extremely small. Within minutes, one is accepted and can take advantage of the services provided without immediate pecuniary consequences. The largest platforms offer a variety of different development opportunities for both active and passive users. Both narcissistic self-promoters and silent observers seem to find enough attention, gratification and distraction to remain on the platforms in the longer term. The platforms offer people new, comparatively non-binding forms of sociability that prove to be suitable for everyday use and enable a specific, measured commitment.

However, it is the respective corporate headquarters that determine the conditions under which access and interactions take place on the platforms, functioning as power structures that are controlled and regulated by entrepreneurs. In addition, the financing follows indirectly and covertly. The almost totalitarian controlled commercial platforms can be regarded as soft power, because they succeed in making their offers and services appear so attractive that a millionfold demand is created. On the other hand, the successful platforms have succeeded in making the associated dependencies seem fair and manageable for users and competitors. The soft power lies precisely in

the fact that millions of people, on a superficial, voluntary basis, declare themselves to be willing to adhere to the rules and structures of the platforms and actively help leave data traces free of charge by means of content and interactions. These traces are then commercially marketed by the platform operators. The sociability institutionalized and recorded by platforms is strongly structured by their business model. The content is exchangeable, and the forums are equally parallel. Nonetheless, the services and content provided allow platform operators to record and process more than 100 characteristics of an individual user (see Stalder, 2015).

On the dominant social platforms, half a dozen businesses decide on the standards, conditions of membership and technical protocols. Entrepreneurial control over the communicative and interactive infrastructure of a particular platform enables monopolization within and between social platforms, the latter mainly on the basis of network effects. With increasing network power, a voluntary retreat becomes more and more unlikely, because the social costs of being excluded rise at the same pace. In that sense, network power has a disciplining effect, both internally and externally. The inequality or dependencies between the platform operator and the platform user could hardly be greater, as demonstrated by the following platform characteristics:

- Unilateral requirements by the owner/management in the form of general terms and conditions.
- Unpaid labour in the form of content of all kinds, specific forms of interaction and – recently – a kind of quality control by users for journalistically produced articles.
- The permanent marketing of all user data traces by the platform owners for their own business activities and those of third parties.

The consequences of such dependencies can be characterized as follows: feelings of powerlessness, of not being able to react and of not knowing one's own algorithm; feelings of isolation, despite the growing, individually composed "community"; and feelings of exploitation on several levels.

While the apparently free participation in the specifically structured sociability can be criticized as a "free lunch", the institutionalization of services on the basis of communicative capitalism must be regarded as problematic. This economic and sometimes also political usability of data in the form of human activities can only be carried out and enforced successfully, that is, exploited, because an extremely institutionalized, that is, monopolistic, power differential prevails between the owners of platforms and their users.

Their power is based on the ability to shape the technical conditions that make it possible for users to act in the first place in such a way that the value gained from the activity of users is increased and at the same time the exclusivity in the use of this data is secured. (Stalder, 2015: 47)

For Stalder, the value of data is based on three uses for network action: first, as a possibility to generate income through personalized advertising; second, as a possibility to predict user behaviour with ever-increasing probability; and, third, as a possibility to adjust the parameters of interaction in such a way that preferred behaviour patterns become more likely (ibid.: 47). All these possibilities can be optimized if the networks succeed in monitoring and recording as many human activities as possible in large numbers of specific groups and converting them into data that are processed in centrally controlled infrastructures, provided with added value and hence attractively prepared for customers.

This extreme power imbalance between social network owners and social network users is based on the one-sided control of protocols and standards. The users have to adapt to the standards, protocols, criteria and options or are excluded from access to the platform. This triggers the network effect and expands the monopoly position.

Leading platforms as the avant garde of digital capitalism?

Staab and Nachtwey (2016: 64) consider the leading American technology groups as the avant-garde of digital capitalism because they explicitly pursue “programs for transforming production processes, corporate structures and market relations”. The key digital companies orient themselves towards a strategy of disruption and radically question or destabilize the functioning of established markets. On the one hand, the resulting transformation pressure on the working world could result in deinstitutionalization and transformation processes and, on the other, in the emergence of a new social order, which in sum could be suitable for producing a new type of capitalist economy. According to Staab and Nachtwey, these core enterprises of digitalization operate the infrastructure of the internet, determine the digital forms of communication and activities of users and supply software and hardware for digital networking. As central operators of strategic digital networks and as indirect and direct employers of hundreds of thousands of employees, these key companies – according to the thesis of the two authors – shape not only the working conditions of the commercially institutionalized internet but also the central developments in society as a whole, far beyond the digital industry (ibid.: 65).

In digital capitalism, some phenomena can be observed that stem from the second industrial revolution: market power, concentration, monopolization and market control (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016). The main reason for this is that both production (marginal costs tend towards zero) and consumption (specific economies of scale) are affected. In addition, the leading companies are establishing hardware and software structures to cover as many of the user needs as possible. Thus, a few social platforms have succeeded in organizing and channelling a considerable amount of social communication and interaction. However, on the basis of the discourse on digital capitalism, a series of challenges can be formulated as an interim conclusion.

Contrary to many popular representations, the technological and social change within the framework of digital capitalism is not disruptive, since the central structural features have been recognizable and graspable for almost twenty years. Within two decades, platform and surveillance capitalism has catapulted the leading internet corporations to the top of the industrial hierarchy and created new challenges, especially for democratic societies. These challenges include big data, surveillance, commodification, exploitation, data protection, monopolization, market power, a lack of transparency, algorithms and corporate platform and network control without social responsibility. The continuing economic success of internet corporations and platform monopolies, on the one hand, and the continuing political inactivity of federal parliaments and government bodies, on the other, have increased the overall risks and worsened the conditions for increased societal and democratic governance.

Media, platform, net and data policy at the institutional level

When it comes to democratic decision making and coping with the risks and challenges of digital capitalism, that is, when more or less concrete policies should be formulated and developed, an analytical perspective must be chosen that is able to cover more or less all the relevant problems (listed above) related to the emergence of digital media and platform capitalism. Such an analytical framework would ask the following questions:

- Why and in what way do the new platforms or intermediaries pose a challenge to society? How do the new intermediaries differ from the legacy media? In which aspects do they not differ? What is their respective power potential and why is it worrying and for whom? What does all this mean for a future platform or media policy?
- How do nation states try to meet the regulatory and legal challenges described above?
- On the basis of which communication science or media policy research can specific challenges be formulated?
- Which normative concepts can be put forward to formulate a corresponding platform policy (e.g. digital citizenship, internet rights and principles, dynamic coalition, etc.; see Glen, 2018)?

How are “relevant” challenges for science-based policies identified? There are a number of possible building blocks to complement and differentiate the political-economic discourse. In addition to the digital divide research (see van Dijk, 2019), there has long been a research tradition dedicated to the relationship between the internet and democracy in networked, digital capitalism (see van Dijk & Hacker, 2018). The formulation of relevant challenges of digital capitalism might also be based on the scientific debate

on single policies, such as the policy of net neutrality or the media ownership policy. Of course, a review of the policies and regulations that have already been implemented in this area and of the various forms of governance could be undertaken. According to Judit Bayer (in this volume), however, these efforts are still in their infancy (see also Jarren, 2018). In addition, white papers or position papers of political parties, interest groups, national governments and supranational institutions with their respective objectives within the framework of a digital agenda (Digital Agenda for Europe – Driving European growth digitally (COM(2010)245); Digital Agenda for Estonia, etc.) could also be analysed. However, political wish lists and declarations of intent are not often politically meaningful. The same applies to digital manifestos from the scientific community (see e.g. Digital Democracy instead of Data Dictatorship, 2015).

A German communication scientist (Neuberger, 2017) recently proposed to start the analysis from politically and scientifically highly consensual values, namely freedom, equality, integration, security, diversity and the quality of information and discourse, rather than from a theoretical perspective of any kind. This canon of values might be acceptable by a majority of people, and it can certainly be helpful in launching a debate on media, data and platform policy. However, as soon as these values need to be hierarchized and concretized in terms of media and platform policy, fundamental contradictions appear and the conflicting interests of media corporations, platform operators, the state, the political parties, the advertising industry and groups from the civil society become visible. Picard and Pickard (2017) made a similar attempt by agreeing on seven normative, also more or less consensual, principles within the framework of media, data and platform politics and concretizing them through 23 objectives. The 7 selected policy objectives formulated by Picard and Pickard are the following:

1. Meeting the basic communicative and content-related needs of the citizens of a country. The focus is the abstract promotion of media and internet freedom by the state and specifically the promotion of informative and entertaining content in the public interest oriented towards democracy. In addition, market failures should be eliminated and the participation of civil society in the debate on the development of the digital media should be facilitated.
2. Providing effective opportunities/capabilities for public use of media and communications. It calls for the provision of universal access to affordable infrastructures and services based on interoperability and interconnectivity.
3. Promoting diversity and plurality with regard to media and platform ownership and available content. In negative terms, the aim is to prevent growth and abuse of monopolistic media and communication power.
4. Protection for users and society with regard to invasive surveillance, consumer protection, data security, hate speech and depictions of violence.
5. Increased accountability for providers and increased transparency for consumers with regard to services, pricing, data collection, algorithms and ownership.

6. Promoting economic benefits through investment incentives and competition.
7. Promoting participation in public consultation and decision-making processes in media and platform policies.

As long as the interests of civil society appear to be considered sufficiently and no contradictions between the individual seven objectives are explicitly formulated, such sets of objectives are perceived as involving little conflict. On the other hand, these objectives become controversial as soon as the leading and affected stakeholders participate or are able to participate in the actual consultation and decision-making processes. These groups will not only formulate the urgent challenges, risks and dangers from their particular point of view but will also propose specific instruments and regulations to reduce undesirable developments. At the same time, it is also a question of promoting developments that are seen as opportunities for digital capitalism. What is viewed as a risk and what is viewed as an opportunity are highly controversial, as are the instruments themselves and the way in which they are regulated. In addition, the transition from an analogue to a digital media policy has completely overtaxed not only the legacy media but also the extremely fragmented academic world. A comprehensive industrial perspective is completely lacking outside political-economic perspectives. Accordingly, the “regulatory discourse” in individual disciplines is more or less harmless and helpless with regard to the digital media world.

On the basis of the two chapters, a number of challenging questions can be formulated that need to be taken into account when concretizing the digital media policy in Europe. However, weighting and ranking can only be carried out if specificities of national contexts are taken into account. The following basic questions are in the foreground:

1. What place should the classical legacy media, that is, the commercial sector (press, radio and television as well as online media) and the public sector (radio and television as well as possibly online media) occupy in the digital media world?
2. How should the market failure, that is, the growing concentration processes and the abuse of market power in the individual digital media industries (from press publishers to platform operators and infrastructure groups) be countered by the state?
3. In what ways should the state promote or demand journalistic media, media and communication diversity, broadband infrastructures, public information utility, common carriage and services of all kinds within the framework of diverse digital media landscapes? How does the state promote democratically legitimate and journalistically demanding informative and entertaining contributions on the internet?
4. To what extent and in what way should the state be enabled to monitor the digital media or to carry out the monitoring itself?

5. Which tasks should be taken over in which way by the state within the framework of data and consumer protection?
6. What leading or subsidiary role should the state play in data security?
7. What role should the state play in the commercialization of big data analytics?
8. Which labour policy problems should not be left to the traditional social partners but should be regulated politically?
9. How should accountability, transparency, consumer protection and social responsibility be increasingly demanded from stakeholders?
10. How should civil society be increasingly involved in decision-making processes (multi-stakeholder approach)?

An approach that reaches beyond the scientific media and data policy would be to record and analyse media and data policy reporting in up-to-date media with regard to the relevant actors in the policy process. This would be less of a discourse analysis than an inventory of events regarded as relevant to media and data policy coping. At the same time, it is also a matter of validating the latest and most up-to-date scientific and political discourses. This is obvious in so far as the scientific and political discourse often lags behind public, up-to-date headlines.

The focus of criticism in daily reporting on media, data and platform policies is on at least three more or less clearly distinguishable areas or problems, namely the business model (1), the market power of providers of legacy and platform media (2) and the entrepreneurial behaviour of platform providers, especially Facebook (3).

Disputed business model

The business model of Google and Facebook is regarded as the most sophisticated of all: it generates the basic material (data) needed to produce services sold on the market (targeted advertising) almost free of charge. Consequently, Facebook's business model in particular is described as parasitic, with the justification that Facebook owes its corporate value, which is exclusively appropriated by shareholders, primarily to the interactions between users. It is also said that such a business model beats the democracy model, since profit maximization by owners and investors undermines the supportive role of the media and platforms for democracy. The business model of the commercially oriented legacy media is still based on advertising revenues, even though these have been declining for almost 20 years, and has accepted the risk of permanently impairing the self-proclaimed independence. The widespread inability and the almost notorious unwillingness of legacy media companies to adapt the "proven" and "profitable" business model to the new digital capitalism environment are often criticized or met with incomprehension.

Unchallenged market power

Facebook (Instagram, Whatsapp) and Google (Youtube, Gmail) are profit-oriented platforms that can hardly be ignored, because there are no comparable offerings on the market. The market-dominating position strengthens the network effects, consolidates the monopolistic position and leads to profit-maximizing monitoring of corporations (GAFA) that are democratically controlled. The powerful business enterprises pose a threat to democracy, as their market power seems unbroken, despite recent adversities and declining user numbers in the case of Facebook.

Entrepreneurial behaviour of Facebook

In connection with the journalistic scandalization of Facebook in the first months of 2018, a large number of phenomena in the political and media sphere were revealed. Firstly, there are incidents concerning the following keywords: fake news, lies, propaganda (jihadist, fascist), hate speech and disinformation as well as radio and video forgeries. In concrete terms, there is talk of a Russian propaganda battle, and the interference in, and even manipulation of, national elections. Particular criticism targets the so-called filter bubbles produced by companies for commercial reasons. The control measures applied by Facebook in the course of such incidents have sometimes been referred to as censorship. The entrepreneurial, generally non-transparent, procedure for the prophylactic prevention of fake news and distortions of all kinds is met with criticism.

Secondly, the criticism also concerns insufficient or even lacking data protection as well as the misuse of data, for example data sales to third parties and data purchases from third parties. These have been interpreted as “insatiable data hunger” according to a title in the renowned Swiss daily newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ). Specifically, Facebook has been criticized for sharing user files with the group’s subsidiaries Instagram, Whatsapp, Altas, Onavo, Moves, Oculus, Masquerade and Crowd Tangle. The network group Facebook has been accused of passing on part of its user data to third parties outside the group structure and even receiving data from its clients. In addition, Facebook itself purchases data from data vendors such as Acxiom, Epsilon and Quantum. Fundamental criticism has been levelled at the unknown extent to which data are collected and presumed to be commercialized but also at the lack of security preventing unauthorized access to the data. Lastly, accusations of planned and organized obscurity of entrepreneurial action have been raised.

Thirdly, the relation of dominance between corporate data collectors and their users, which has already been mentioned several times, has also been problematized. There has been talk of a “serious imbalance”. The “exchange” is rather seen as “exploitation” and not worthwhile for the users. In other words, the effort required by the platform operators to provide the services is out of proportion, once the valuable interactions of the users and the revenues of the platforms through “data sales” and “data theft” (stolen, misused, borrowed, hacked or purchased data packages) are taken into account.

Fourthly, the blatant contradiction between social mission and entrepreneurial behaviour has been addressed. Free service for networking all people, that is, “give everyone the power to share anything with anyone” and make the world better (... I hope (...) we can build the new social infrastructure to create the world we want for future generations) on the one hand, and a radical, ruthless economic libertarian approach (“move fast and break things. Unless you are breaking stuff, you aren’t moving fast enough”) on the other (see Taplin, 2017).

Fifthly, further contradictions are being thematized in the public debate, prototypically using Facebook as an example. More specifically, the debate has insinuated a contradiction between the damage that has occurred to the reputation of the company and the extent of quarterly closings. Contrary to market economy rhetoric, no linear connection between the two is discernible and the company is not punished financially to the same extent. In other words, the situation has been summarized in two words: market failure. In addition, Facebook has threatened legacy media with legal steps in the run-up to the publication of unpleasant incidents and, at the same time, made rather inconsequential guilty pleas. The comparatively modest tax burdens and the fantastic corporate profits have also been seen as contradictions of globally active platforms. The complaints concern the fact that the average effective tax rate of digital corporations is not even half that of conventional industrial companies. Finally, a contradiction has been noted between the easy access to the platforms on the one hand and the very extensive and complicated, difficult to understand, general business terms on the other.

Towards an integrated platform, network and data policy?

There is no doubt that communication science has difficulties capturing the prevailing digital development in its technical, factual and “media-political” dimensions. National or global politics also appear to be rather helpless and inhibited. This greatly concerns the fact that the leading companies in the digital industry have long been operating from a position of strength and so far have successfully defended themselves against regulation that is harmful to them. What is more, the activities of technology and platform companies can at best be captured in terms of the telecommunication policy. However, nation states tend to react cautiously in terms of network, data or platform policy or regulation. Some of them expect a boost to their development through digitalization and are even making political efforts to benefit from the entrepreneurial achievements of the platform companies. Of course, this reticence is also based on the widespread belief that individual users act independently, accept specific contractual conditions and do not wait for a state placet.

In any case, it is worth noting that restraints in media policy and digital policy clearly contrast the public demands for comprehensive regulation. Some initial, “soft” regulatory attempts have already been made in Europe, for example the Council of

Europe's Guidelines on human rights for internet users (2014), the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to the Member States on internet freedom (2016) and the Recommendations of the Joint Conference of the OSCE and the Council of Europe on internet freedom (2018). In May 2018, the EU's Data protection basic regulation (2016) entered into force. However, it is not yet possible to make any statements on its effectiveness or its consequences. The only certainty is that there are no cross-sectoral regulations to be found anywhere in the world. In the best-case scenario, approaches in the area of co-regulation and corporate self-regulation can be identified. However, those are fraught with major weaknesses from a democratic perspective. We must expect not only commodification and privatization of regulation and law, in which economic interests dominate the public interest, but also the consequences that state or supra-state regulation and legislation will tend to be prevented in the future. This is despite the fact that the market control is just as weak as the role of civil society users of networks and services. In the daily newspaper reports, there are demands that extend far beyond the ideas of the responsible policy makers. In this way, the "absolutist data octopuses" are to be smashed, expropriated, regulated and/or communitized. There are also demands that have so far hardly made it into the political discourse on networks, platforms and data protection, such as:

- A binding platform–entrepreneurial institutionalization of fact checkers
- Antitrust punishment for abuse by companies with market power
- Organized mass exodus of users
- Development of codes of conduct for online platforms
- Standard of new data protection guidelines for platforms and service providers
- Labelling requirements for social bots
- Transparency rules for online searches
- Full, sovereign and free data control by users
- An enforced catalogue of fines for incriminated entrepreneurial behaviour
- Introducing regulations for algorithmic systems
- Defining a Hippocratic Oath for data scientists
- Transparency obligations of government and industry, public authorities and big data merchants with regard to their handling of data: Which data are used in which way in which systems? Which data are needed to train the artificial intelligence?
- Platforms and data merchants must regularly send their users a type of account statement in which it can be seen which data are used how and how this claim can be rejected. It should also be clear how long the data will be stored.

- Obligations to provide information if sensitive data are misused and/or stolen.
- Public financing of alternative, non-commercially oriented search engines and social media is demanded.
- Users are to be granted extensive ownership rights, such as access, transparency, data portability and deletion/forgetting of personal data. This is referred to as informational self-determination, which includes the right to a copy of one's own data.
- Institutionalization of ethical guidelines in artificial intelligence development.

Without having examined and assessed these publicly formulated demands and expectations, it is apparent that digital platform, network and data policies are still in their infancy. This is no surprise, as the platform is controlled by the company itself and not by the state or any other institution. When the state or the politicians hand over competences to the platforms, this strengthens the institutionalization process of those platforms. The platforms are urged to combat effectively the problems that they have created and if possible to “solve” them. As a result, the nation state will hand over jurisdictional and enforcement powers within the framework of a regulated self-regulation policy regime.

The national network policy on questions of data protection, data security, data transfer, data theft, net neutrality, network censorship, hate speech, fake news and so on is strongly influenced by the strategies and measurements of the commercial platforms themselves. The state, however, insists on compliance with rules that extend beyond the company's own services. This in turn leads to the highly commercial platforms exhibiting fundamental regulatory aversion as long as they are not able to influence the entrepreneurial result positively. However, it must be borne in mind that the individual nation states are putting different strategies and measures in place to help their specific interests to prevail. This applies in particular to the US, China and Russia.

Countries as well as platforms are affected by this and present themselves as either a perpetrator or a victim. Here, too, it must first be clarified who is willing to assume which role and responsibility, including, of course, civil society or at least parts of it. While the established platforms already have partial cyber sovereignty, this cannot be said of the state and certainly not of the data sovereignty of civil society, something sought above all by the academic sphere (see Helbing et al., 2015).

Economy-liberal states such as Switzerland are holding back in terms of platform, network and/or data policy, in the hope of benefiting the most from digitalization in a politically restrained manner, in the role of free rider. Whether a weak state in terms of network, data and platform policy is, however, in a position to ensure that the infrastructures and services that are important for society are properly regulated in such a way that society as a whole is institutionally safeguarded in the long term and the civil society acquires its rights and duties within the framework of human rights remains highly questionable under the primacy of digital capitalism.

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INEQUALITIES are the unwanted companions of media and communication. Traditional analogue mass media were criticized for creating inequalities by being biased, serving hegemonic interests, and accumulating far too much power in the hands of mighty industrial conglomerates. Under the digital regime, most inequalities survived, and new ones occurred. Knowledge gaps transformed into digital divides, news journalism is challenged by social networking sites, and global corporate monopolies outperform national media companies. Algorithmic selection, surveillance, Big Data and the Internet of Things are creating new inequalities which follow traditional patterns of class, gender, wealth and education. This book revisits old and new media and communication inequalities in times of digital transition. It has been written in a collective effort by the members of THE EUROMEDIA RESEARCH GROUP.

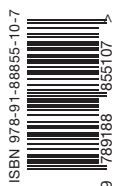
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