



#speakup

BAROMETER

UKRAINE

ASSESSING DIGITAL PARTICIPATION

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#speakup barometer

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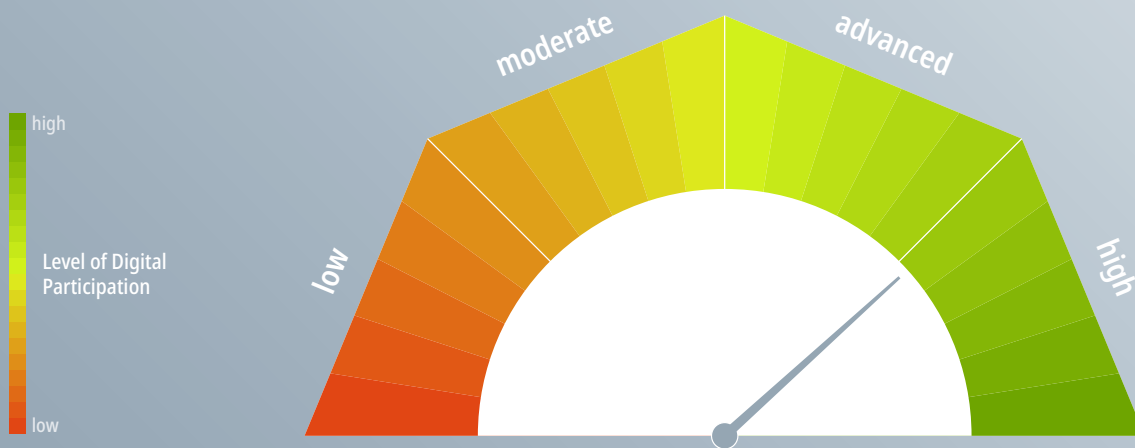
RESPONSIBLE

Carsten von Nahmen

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Ukraine



The overall results of the #speakup barometer research suggest that the level of digital participation in Ukraine is at an advanced level as the needle is pointing into the green section of the barometer.

Key Findings

With a vibrant IT sector and some of the cheapest internet access in the world, Ukraine offers a solid foundation for digital participation. The country's active civil society has started many initiatives fostering participation online. At the same time, it has been successful in preventing legislation that would have jeopardized digital rights. However, while there are impressive exceptions to the rule, Ukrainian media outlets are often too weak financially to collaborate with the country's IT sector for the sake of their own innovation. Moreover, public debate in Ukraine's highly politicized society remains vulnerable in light of Russia's informational warfare against the country.



ACCESS

With price for access among the lowest in the world, internet is affordable for most Ukrainians. However, usage depends on age. Over 80 percent of people under the age of 45 are online.



DIGITAL RIGHTS

Ukraine's internet environment is largely unregulated, but informational warfare from Russia threatens to change that. Some fear that digital rights will be sacrificed in the name of national security.



MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

In Ukraine, most quality journalism is done by online media, but many outlets depend almost exclusively on advertisement for their income.



SOCIETY

In recent years, the fight against Russian propaganda has shaped the debate about the internet in Ukraine. Today, Ukrainians are quite aware of the dangers of disinformation and the need for more media and information literacy.



INNOVATION

While the strong Ukrainian IT sector is oriented towards the export market, many media outlets find it difficult to assess what kind of innovation will make them more successful. But there are exceptions to the rule.

Ukraine



Specific results for the various factors influencing digital participation in Ukraine. The better the results in a specific cluster, the more the color field extends towards the greener, outer edge of the web. Ukraine, where the price of internet access is among the lowest in the world, has a particularly high score in the area of Access. Experts fear that digital rights will be sacrificed in the name of national security, a fact which is reflected in the lower score in the thematic area of Digital Rights. Furthermore many media outlets depend almost exclusively on advertisement for their income. Therefore the thematic clusters of Media and Journalism shows room for improvement.



Access: Low prices, good connectivity — Ukrainian internet infrastructure allows usage to grow rapidly

With price for access among the lowest in the world, internet is affordable for most Ukrainians. However, usage depends on age. Over 80 percent of people under the age of 45 are online.

In Derhachi, a small town outside of Kharkiv, the internet has a physical address: Sumska Street 163G, office 309. A side entrance to a Soviet-style commercial building leads the way to a badly-lit corridor above the local supermarket. On the door of office 309, a simple sign reads "DaNet," a pun that in Russian translates either as "Yes-No" or "Yes-Net." DaNet is Derhachi's biggest internet provider, serving 3,000 households and businesses in a town of roughly 20,000 inhabitants. "We can provide up to one Gigabit per second," says manager Natalya Fisun with a smile somewhere between modesty and pride.

According to Fisun, while DaNet's main competitor, the state-owned Ukrtelekom, is still operating with the much slower copper lines of its telephone network in Derhachi, DaNet is extending its fiber optic network.

DaNet is one of about 1,500 internet service providers active in Ukraine. Over 6,000 companies are registered as such with the authorities—a pro-forma procedure. "Ukraine is one of the

most liberal countries with regard to internet regulation," says Vitaliy Moroz, head of new media at Internews Ukraine. "For a long time, the government only looked at television." It was TV that promised political control over the masses; the internet was free to develop.

Internet prices among the lowest in the world

As a result, Ukrainian internet is barely regulated. Many internet service providers operate—like DaNet—akin to monopolists within one small town or even village, while in the cities, up to 15 providers can compete for customers within a single apartment building. "Competition keeps the prices down," says Moroz. The price of broadband internet in Ukraine is among the lowest in the world.

"We started four years ago, offering broadband internet for apartment buildings," says Fisun. Now, DaNet has expanded into the neighborhoods with detached houses, the predominant housing style in Derhachi. DaNet buys its traffic from the

Summary

- Ukraine's internet is barely regulated
- 1,500 internet service providers offer broadband internet, many with high data rates
- The costs for broadband internet are among the lowest in the world
- Ukraine only adopted 4G mobile internet in 2018, but network operators are quickly building up their network
- The open structure of the Ukrainian internet makes it difficult to block information effectively

Access

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Access: **high**

central lines that connect the country. "We then use the regional energy company poles for our fiber optic cables within town," says Fisun. "But this remains difficult."

In theory, a new law regulates prices for access to energy company poles. It was meant to create equal opportunities for Ukraine's smaller internet service providers, who, in many places, are a driving force behind the digitalization of the country. Since prices for renting the poles are capped, the energy company has introduced extra fees for access to its poles. "There is still a lack of transparency," says Fisun.

“Ukraine has a very strong internet backbone.

Maksym Tulyev, Ukrainian Internet Association

4G mobile internet only started in 2018

While Ukraine made great strides in the field of broadband internet, mobile access to the internet has been lagging behind for a long time. "All of Europe is discussing 5G, and we have only recently got 4G in bigger cities," says Maksym Tulyev from the Ukrainian internet Association, a lobby group. The Ukrainian authorities only began issuing 4G licenses in 2018. "We are building the network very quickly, but haven't rolled out 4G in the entire country." As for the next step, 5G, discussions between the industry and the government have not even begun, according to Tulyev. "Nevertheless, I assume the network operators are already working on it." Operators started building their 4G networks long before they received a license for it, says Tulyev. "So, when they received their licenses, all they had to do was switch it on."

Most of the big mobile networks are owned by Russian businessmen. In fact, with tensions between Russia and Ukraine at a high point, MTS (short for Moscow Telephone Systems) bought a Vodafone franchise in order to disguise its Russian origin.

Internet penetration growing rapidly

With the explosion of 4G internet use within the last year, up-to-date numbers on internet penetration in Ukraine are hard to come by. One survey put it as high as 93 percent. A study by Factum Group Ukraine, a media research company, puts the number of Ukrainians using the internet once a month or more often at 64 percent, with the highest internet usage among people under the age of 45, at 82 to 90 percent. The gap between big cities, where 74 percent use the internet regularly, and rural areas with usage levels at 54 percent is relatively small. "Seventy percent of the country has good connections," says Vitaliy Moroz with regard to mobile coverage. "The rest are remote areas with rural populations."

Currently, there is no obligation for mobile providers to cover the entire country, says Moroz, but there is a debate: "Who should provide access, the government or the mobile operators? And at whose expense?"

Zero-rating common, but not yet a threat to participation

Ukrainian mobile phone providers do offer zero-rating packages for messenger services or access to Facebook or YouTube, says Vita Volodovska from the Digital Security Lab. "In Ukraine, this is not as serious a problem as in other countries, where everybody has access to WhatsApp, but not to the internet." With data packages often including 20 to 30 GB of data per month, free access to certain services does not have a substantial effect on digital participation.

The Ukrainian digital infrastructure is very well connected to international networks. "Ukraine has a very strong backbone," says Maksym Tulyev from the Ukrainian internet Association. "Since there is barely any regulation, providers are free to lay their own cables or rent capacity." "We have several connections to big hubs in Frankfurt and Warsaw through Poland, Hungary, and Romania."

Internet structure makes it difficult to block information

As a result, the infrastructure of the Ukrainian internet makes it difficult to block information. "We have so many internet providers, that it is virtually impossible to control every one of them," says Vita Volodovska. "We would have to build a separate internet like China with limited connections to the outside."

The openness of the Ukrainian internet also limits the effect of former President Petro Poroshenko's decision to block the sites of certain Russian media outlets and social networks, as far from all providers complied with the decree.

Recommendations

The government should follow through on telecommunications plans

While the government has made big commitments on connectivity and access to even remote areas of the country, project implementation and the enactment of relevant legislation has been slow.

Start preparing for 5G now

With a very internet-savvy population and an export-focused IT sector, Ukraine cannot afford to be as late with the implementation of 5G as it was with 4G. The government therefore needs to prepare the licensing process now.

Have a debate on net neutrality

Zero-rating does not constitute a danger to digital participation. However, society needs to be made more aware of how important fair access is to digital participation.



Digital Rights: Could digital freedom in Ukraine become a casualty of Russia's info wars?

Ukraine's internet environment is largely unregulated, but informational warfare from Russia threatens to change that. Some fear that digital rights will be sacrificed in the name of national security.

Summary

- Russian info-warfare has shaped the debate on digital rights in Ukraine and strengthened calls for more regulation
- Bill 6688, a bill that threatened freedom of speech and enlarged the reach of the security services, was stopped
- Open data laws are in place and used by journalists
- There are few options for the protection of personal data
- Online media outlets do not have to register in Ukraine, making it difficult to prove that the rights of journalists extend to them

Digital Rights

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Digital Rights: **advanced**

It was an attempt to use the Russia's informational warfare against Ukraine to curtail digital rights within the country. Draft law number 6688, put forward by the parliamentary committee for national security, would have given Ukrainian security services the power to take websites down temporarily. For the time being, Ukrainian civil society has managed to stop the bill. But the pressure for greater internet regulation remains.

The law was—in the opinion of many experts—overzealous in regulating the country's internet. Civil society feared that it would have given state security agencies powers that could easily be abused. "Media organizations acted quite quickly and were unanimously against this law," says Maksym Dvorovyj, a lawyer at the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM), a "think-and-act tank" in Kyiv.

In interviews with DW Akademie, most experts stressed that Ukraine has one of the most unregulated internet environments in the world. The Ukrainian constitution guarantees freedom of speech, as does the legislation regulating the media. "The general framework with regards to freedom of expression is more or less compliant with international standards," says Dvorovyj. Guarantees against censorship are in place, and journalists' rights are secured. Several provisions in the media laws are aimed at protecting journalists from physical attacks and interference in their work.

Difficulties in enforcing media laws

However, the Media Sustainability Index 2019 report documents difficulties in enforcing these rights: "Poor political will and sabotage by law enforcement and judicial bodies undermine the

application of sound legislation and augment impunity for crimes against journalists." According to the experts, "only those who are better organized and more resourceful—i.e., business and politicians—are able to protect themselves." In a 2017 survey by netfreedom.org.ua, a web resource supported by Internews Ukraine, 55 percent of the experts said the state of internet freedom in Ukraine was becoming "somewhat" or "considerably worse." Just over 40 percent declared that the situation "hadn't changed."

Conflict with Russia dominates debate on digital rights

The conflict with Russia has revealed the country's vulnerability to cyberattacks and misinformation campaigns, sparking a debate about the expansion of internet regulations. Draft law 6688 would have allowed prosecutors to ban websites for 48 hours without a court order if lives were endangered. Furthermore, websites could have been taken down when used to coordinate crimes. Pretending to agree to a homicide in the comment section of an online publication could have been enough to silence that media outlet, warns Maksym Dvorovyj. "We need to establish certain notice and takedown procedures to combat the spread of hate speech and incitement of violence," the lawyer admits. Such procedures are, in fact, in place in many countries. Law 6688, in his view, is largely an attempt by the security services to abuse their authority.

This legislative initiative is part of a larger debate within Ukraine on how to fight back against Russian propaganda. Some activists fear that Ukrainian politicians could impose new regulations aimed against Russian propaganda that could establish mechanisms to limit free speech within Ukrainian society as

well. "The blocking of Russian websites violates the digital rights of Ukrainians," says Vita Volodovska from Digital Security Lab.

Unlike print or broadcasting outlets, online media houses do not have to register with the government. "On the one hand, this is good as internet media cannot be denied a potential registration," says Volodovska. "On the other hand, it makes it more difficult to extend the special rights journalists have to those working for online media outlets." Online journalists could find it more difficult to protect their sources; or they could run the risk of facing full liability if they spread misinformation despite engaging in due diligence over the course of their investigation.

A lack of debate on digital rights

In Ukraine, very few people talk about digital rights. "We lack a common understanding of how the state is supposed to protect its citizens' rights on the internet," says Volodovska. In particular, the protection of personal data is weak. The data protection law was passed at the same time as an anti-corruption law. "The lawmakers' main goal was therefore to protect state employees from having to disclose their assets," says Volodovska. If personal data is leaked, citizens have little opportunity to take action. "This topic has not been given any priority on the agenda," agrees Maksym Dvorovyj. He expects a new initiative in the foreseeable future to bring Ukraine into compliance with EU standards of data protection.

There is an open data law from 2011 in place with relatively good provisions for access to data. Digital media outlets like Texty.org use public data to produce visualizations and complete investigations. Furthermore, there are smartphone applications such as Easyway using open data from the public transportation network in Kyiv and 55 other major cities to show the departure times of busses and trolleybuses in real time.

“We lack a clear definition of propaganda.

Vita Volodovska, Digital Security Lab

Ukrainian Internet Governance Forum

A Ukrainian Internet Governance Forum has existed since 2010. It is organized by the Internet Association of Ukraine, an industry lobby group. In recent years, the Digital Security Lab has also joined as a co-organizer. "The Ukrainian Internet Governance Forum is debating," says Maksym Tulyev from the Internet Association of Ukraine. "But I don't know of a single case where they were able to put anything into action."

"It's a very formal event," agrees Volodovska. The Digital Security Lab is therefore planning to establish a festival for digital rights as a way to bring the debate into the heart of Ukrainian society. According to her, Ukrainians' grasp of the topic is too weak. "People do not understand why they should stand up for their digital rights." The NGO has therefore started to co-

operate with "offline" human rights defenders in order to build broader coalitions within civil society.

Such a coalition will be much needed. "Now there is basically no opportunity to pass any law that would improve the regulatory environment," says Dvorovyj. "This is basically why NGOs try to encourage the non-interference of the state in the online sphere." Since draft law 6688 failed, the Ukrainian internet remains fairly unregulated. But the bill can be put forward again at any time. Ukrainian civil society must remain vigilant.

Recommendations

Maksym Dvorovyj wants civil society to

continue to oppose legislative initiatives that disproportionately restrict internet freedom (as did draft law No. 6688), while proposing its own regulatory approaches based on international standards.

Conduct campaigns to make Ukrainians aware of the value of their digital rights

A digital rights festival as planned by the Digital Security Lab could be an important step forward. The public broadcaster UA:PBC could foster debate as well.

Improve legislation protecting personal data and train judges to ensure implementation



Media and Journalism: In Ukraine's vibrant online media landscape, viability remains a challenge

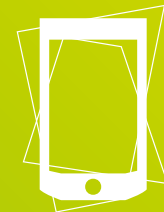
In Ukraine, most quality journalism is done by online media, but many outlets depend almost exclusively on advertisement for their income.

Summary

- Ukraine's online media outlets have long offered an alternative to politicized traditional media providers
- Big media conglomerates distort the media market, making it difficult for quality journalism to make money online
- Ukraine has a very active civil society, including a vibrant citizen journalism community
- Going digital is a huge challenge for regional media outlets
- The reform of public broadcaster UA:PBC led to more balanced reporting, but it is too small to be a viable alternative

Media and Journalism

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Media and Journalism: **advanced**

A video camera, two tables with microphones—in a stylish press-center, two ecologists are presenting their new recycling initiative for the city of Kharkiv. The brick wall behind them features the logo of Nakipelo, a young media organization that works to counteract the lack of impartial information in Ukraine's second largest city.

Nakipelo covers topics from the refurbishment of a city park and the success stories of Kharkiv's biotech industry to the war in the Donbass region. For civil society organizations, Nakipelo's press center has long become a crucial platform to increase their visibility. Nakipelo streams their press conferences live on Facebook so they can be used as part of their advocacy work. The young media outlet sees hosting press conferences as part of its mission to work for a stronger civil society in Ukraine.

Maidan protests sparked many new media outlets

It is not a coincidence that Nakipelo has assumed this role. The team started engaging in journalism as citizen reporters during the Maidan protests of 2014. With the Russian annexation of Crimea and pro-Russian tensions rising in Ukraine's Donbass region, there was substantial fear that the situation would become increasingly unstable in predominantly Russian-speaking Kharkiv. The team remembers that time, "one of the most pressing issues was the lack of information." Nakipelo, Russian for "It's boiling over," started reporting. For many on the team, it was their first exposure to journalistic work.

During the Maidan protests, the annexation of Crimea, and the war in the Donbass that followed, Ukraine experienced a huge

rise in civil society activity. When pro-Russian protests started in Kharkiv in spring 2014, Oleksandr Anchyskyn (among many others) started tweeting, posting information on where pro-Russian actions were planned. Today he has 10,300 followers on the messaging service. His goal is to hold local government accountable. "I want to tell people about problems, so that the authorities can act on them," says Anchyskyn, who since has run for the local council of his hometown, Dehachy near Kharkiv.

Five years after Maidan, Ukraine's society is still highly politicized. "People want to be heard," says Nakipelo's co-founder Roman Danilenkov, describing the motivation of many citizen reporters. "They want to change things." Having matured into a professional media outlet, Nakipelo continues to cooperate with citizen journalists like Anchyskyn, training them and publishing their stories in a project supported by DW Akademie.

Digital media offer different voices

Nakipelo is part of Ukraine's vibrant digital media landscape, offering quality journalism and voices different from those in the traditional media. As most major media outlets are owned by conglomerates controlled by the country's influential oligarchs, going digital provides an alternative to the politicized traditional media institutions, with low entry barriers for new projects. Under the authoritarian rule of former president Victor Yanukovich, high profile journalists left their media outlets under pressure and founded new ones online; more appeared during the Maidan protests.

Quality journalism is mostly digital

Today, most of Ukraine's quality journalism is digital, including some high-profile investigative media projects, though a lack of professionalization remains a problem for many media outlets. "There is good journalism, but there is not enough of it," says media expert Tetyana Lebedeva. In her opinion, a lack of media and information literacy among journalists makes media outlets vulnerable to spreading fake news. Regional online media institutions, in particular, are still copying too much information from other sources. Many traditional media outlets with regional audiences struggle with their transformation into digital media houses.

“Media outlets should better orientate their audiences.

Iryna Solovey, Garage Gang

Difficult market for independent media

In Ukraine, online media outlets don't require licensing or registration. Despite a low barrier to enter the market, many media outlets struggle to remain viable in a market deeply distorted by oligarchic media conglomerates. As political influence is more valuable than financial profit to their owners, most of the oligarch media operates at a loss. This creates an unfair playing field, says Maria Fronoschuk, media consultant and CEO of Platfor.ma, a media website, "For other media outlets, it is very hard to compete with their budgets and reach." Fronoschuk says that "most rely mainly on advertising as a business model." But the small advertising budgets available do not allow for substantial growth, "especially if you want to report on socially important issues — and not only on cats."

In Fronoschuk's experience, many media outlets lack the resources, both financially and in terms of know-how, to analyze their audience in a way that would allow them to tailor their products and business models to concrete target groups and thus increase profitability. "It's almost a vicious circle."

Unmarked paid content widespread

As a result, "jeansa," journalistic slang for paid commercial or political materials disguised as journalistic content, continues to be a widespread phenomenon in Ukraine's digital media landscape. In a study on the spring 2019 presidential elections, the Institute for Mass Information found 9.8 percent of all materials published on the candidates in regional media outlets were paid for, and were thus "jeansa."

Public service broadcasters too weak to fill the gap

In this difficult business environment for digital media, public service media could fulfil an important role in offering balanced reporting on relevant issues. Two different models of public service media have emerged in Ukraine. When the commercial Ukraine TV channel TVi changed ownership and was politically

streamlined in 2013, its journalists founded Hromadske (English: Public TV), an internet TV and radio station, as well as a news website, financed through crowdfunding and by grants from donor organizations. Hromadske offers high quality news and background talk radio and TV on relevant political topics. There is also UA:PBC, the former state broadcaster turned public service TV and radio channel. Still fighting with its existing poor reputation, UA:PBC's ratings are currently less than 1 percent of market share. However, while TV programming is still perceived as fairly uncompetitive and boring, its news programs are seen as the most balanced available in the Ukrainian TV market. In terms of radio, UA:PBC launched a well-reviewed new youth radio station, broadcast mainly through the internet.

Recommendations

Improve funding for public broadcaster

In Ukraine's difficult media market, a public broadcasting service could play an important role in fostering debate within society and making space for more diverse voices. However, UA:PBC would need more funding in order to live up to the expectations put on it after its transformation from a state broadcaster

Online media outlets need to experiment with new business models

Ukrainian online media providers are in need of new business models in order to become viable in the digital media landscape. However, many media houses, especially in outlying regions, lack the know-how to find new sources of revenue. They must embrace a culture of innovation

Give citizen reporters a voice

As many owners regard their media outlets as a means of wielding political influence, Ukrainian media providers do not include a sufficient diversity of voices from civil society in their coverage. The media landscape would therefore profit from the voices of citizens reporters, many of whom are active within civil society



Society: Ukrainian society retains spirit of debate despite disinformation and trolling

In recent years, the fight against Russian propaganda has shaped the debate about the internet in Ukraine. Today, Ukrainians are quite aware of the dangers of disinformation and the need for more media and information literacy.

Summary

- Ukrainians are very active on social media, but meaningful debate has increasingly moved into closed groups
- As part of its info-warfare, Russian propaganda works with various narratives against Ukraine. However, fake news stories resort to more subtle, harder to detect, manipulation
- Ukraine has blocked major Russian social networks and roughly 200 websites. The decree blocking these websites is controversial within the media community
- Media and information literacy is a focus of public debate

Society

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Society: **advanced**

The setting is basic: Stopfake records its weekly program on fake news at the control desk of a TV studio. In front of a blurred wall of TV screens, host Viktoriia Romaniuk attempts to debunk the latest Russian hoaxes about Ukraine. First topic of this episode: Russia's disinformation campaign against the new law on Ukrainian as the state language.

"The law has been received both with applause and criticism," Romaniuk summarizes the debate within Ukraine. "But Russian media has stirred up a storm of outrage. The propagandists said the law contradicts the Ukrainian constitution." Then she starts to dissect, piece by piece, how Russian state media has manipulated the facts to reach its conclusion.

18 narratives against Ukraine in use by Russian propaganda

The notion that the Russian-speaking part of Ukrainian society is oppressed is among the most common narratives that Russian state media uses in its disinformation campaign against Ukraine, says Olha Yurkova, co-founder of Stopfake, a civil society initiative formed in the wake of the Maidan protests, when journalists from different media outlets joined forces to debunk fake news spread by pro-Russian sources.

Fighting against Russia's informational warfare campaign has been a challenge for Ukraine in a time when the country is trying to reach a new consensus on its future. Research conducted by Stopfake shows that Russia continues to use 18 different narratives against Ukraine, such as the ostensible state discrimination against Russian speakers. The Kremlin's media

machine regularly supplies each of these narratives with new stories. "Propaganda and fake news haven't decreased in the last five years," says Yurkova. "But blunt lies have given way to more subtle forms of manipulation."

Russian web services blocked in Ukraine

In 2017, then Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko issued a decree blocking access to major Russian internet services, such as the social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, as well as the search engine Yandex and Mail.ru, for three years. A year later, 200 websites were also blocked, among them Russian state media, and news outlets from the unrecognized People's Republics in eastern Ukraine. Both decisions continue to be heavily debated within Ukrainian civil society.

"Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki were used to organize special operations against Ukraine," says the media expert Tetyana Lebedeva. "The blocking is a component of our security policy." According to her, Russian social networks were used to disseminate hate speech and appeals to topple the Ukrainian government. "Who could condemn a state for banning this?"

Vitalii Moroz from Internews Ukraina, a Ukrainian media NGO, does see users' rights violated by a decision that was "more illegal than legal." Furthermore, he points out that the presidential decree is only binding for state authorities. In fact, many internet service providers have not blocked the websites in question, allowing many Ukrainians to continue accessing them. Still, Moroz considers the decree to be important. "The Ukrainian government sent a political message," he says. "Be

aware of Russian websites. They can endanger you and your families.”

Infringement of digital rights

Vita Volodovska, a lawyer at the Digital Security Lab in Ukraine, remains more skeptical. “Everyone says: We are only blocking Russian websites—where is the problem? The problem is that we are building a mechanism that allows the president and the security service to decide whom to block.” Volodovska points out that the decision did not contain any explanation for why any given site was blocked. She sees blocking social networks in particular as an infringement on digital rights, because it affects the right of access to information as well as the right to disseminate information.

As many internet service providers refuse to implement the blocking, Vkontakte remains popular among social network users in Ukraine, albeit with a falling market share. With regard to the influence of Russian propaganda, Olha Yurkova points out yet another challenge for Ukrainian society: As disinformation becomes subtler, she sees more fake news stories being picked up by Ukrainian media outlets, due to a lack of professionalization. “Then, nobody realizes anymore that the story initially came from Russia,” says Yurkova. “To debunk this subtle manipulation, you have to be a professional journalist.” Blocking Russian websites won’t solve the problem; at the same time, trust in the media has been falling, according to recent polls.

Challenges to media and information literacy

In this informational environment, media and information literacy (MIL) has gained much more attention in Ukrainian society in recent years. Ukraine’s education system, inherited from the Soviet Union, traditionally did not put a strong emphasis on critical thinking. Thus far, MIL has only been integrated into the curricula at the primary school level. Currently, public hearings on the question of MIL for middle and high schools are underway. Maryna Dorosh, a MIL expert at the NGO Ukrainian Media and Communication Institute in Kyiv, sees a huge challenge in the training of teachers who have to then give the MIL classes.

“Bots are the main problem when it comes to destroying trust on the internet.

Olha Yurkova, Stopfake

Many of Ukraine’s challenges in terms of disinformation and preserving a meaningful public debate are not unique to the country but are more virulent. “Ukraine is a front-line state,” says Tetyana Lebedeva. Nevertheless, most experts characterize Ukrainian society as very politically active and outspoken. Many cities have Twitter or Facebook groups in which users post funny images from everyday life—from a subway train running late, to a tram that has had an accident or dirty toilets in a metro station. In Kharkiv, over 13,000 users follow the city’s

Twitter feed. Other groups focus on specific neighborhoods in the city.

But things are changing. “Facebook used to be a platform for civil society to discuss various issues,” says Olha Yurkova of Stopfake. With the rise of trolls and bots active in Ukrainian social networks, however, people have lost the trust necessary to engage publicly in this kind of discussions. Today, debate has increasingly moved into closed groups.

Recommendations

Implement wide-reaching media and information literacy programs for Ukrainian society

Ukraine has a very active civil society that is able to reach parts of the population that cannot be reached via the educational system. Improving Ukrainians’ MIL skills will make the country even more resilient to Russian fake news and propaganda.

Increase public pressure on big internet companies to assume responsibility

Facebook has been criticized for closing down fake accounts too slowly, while the complaint function continues to be used by trolls to block the accounts of Ukrainian activists. At the same time, Facebook does not have an office in a country whose security depends in part on the social network.



Innovation: Despite Ukraine's strong IT industry, many media outlets struggle with innovation

While the strong Ukrainian IT sector is oriented towards the export market, many media outlets find it difficult to assess what kind of innovation will make them more successful. But there are exceptions to the rule.

Summary

- Ukraine has a world-class IT sector, exporting to the US
- Most media outlets are too weak financially to tap into the potential of Ukraine's world-class coders and IT experts
- Civil society is driving innovation in the media sector
- Coders donate their labor for worthwhile projects
- Most of the research on journalism is conducted by NGOs, not by universities. There is little research on the future of journalism

Innovation

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Innovation:
advanced

Ukraine's second largest city, Kharkiv, is a five-hour train journey east from Kyiv. Surrounded by the Ukrainian steppe, its IT industry is deeply intertwined with the sector's global workflows. Some 95 percent of its orders go abroad, with the US as the most important export market followed by the EU. Ukraine's IT sector is one of the country's success stories. Employing roughly 200,000 people, its share of GDP is growing rapidly. It could provide a solid foundation for an innovative media sector, but most media outlets are financially too weak to profit from the country's world-class coders and IT experts.

As a result, the level of innovation in the Ukrainian media sector remains rather low. "Media managers are not able to assess one important thing," says Mykhailo Koltsov, senior lecturer in journalism at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, one of Ukraine's flagship universities. "Is it worth investing in new technology? Will that help them move forward? So, they continue to work in the traditional way." Many new media outlets are founded as special interest media, says Koltsov. "But they are not innovative with regard to technology or even form."

Open source is vital for financially weak Ukrainian media

In Ukraine's difficult economic environment, open source is vital for many media houses, says Koltsov. "Media outlets are not ready to pay for any kind of software. Sometimes, they lack the financial means; sometimes, the understanding for why they need it."

There are exceptions to the rule however. Platfor.ma is an independent internet platform reporting on innovation and cul-

ture using design thinking. It is constantly experimenting with form, technology, distribution, and viability. Texty.org.ua is a data journalism resource that specializes in interactive visualizations. Voxukraine.org, a web-portal run by economists and lawyers with a mission to improve the level of the economic debate in Ukraine, engages in the fact checking of statements made by Ukrainian politicians, while Stopfake combats Russian propaganda. In Kharkiv, Nakipelo is working to find new ways of doing local journalism.

“Open Source is very important in Ukraine, since media houses are not willing to pay for software.

Mykhailo Koltsov, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

Civil society is driving innovation in the media sector

The fact that most of these projects were initiated by civil society is not a coincidence, says Iryna Solovey, head of Garage Gang, a civil society organization focused on social innovation and the development of Ukrainian society. "Whatever kind of innovation is happening in the media, those behind it consider themselves a part of civil society."

Most media outlets hire coders when they need them for a specific project. "I think IT people are not very open to becoming co-founders of such projects, because in Ukraine most of them are just implementers," says Solovey. "They don't want to sit and think about the ethical aspects of data exchange. They just

say give us the data." In her view, this does not necessarily limit the potential for innovation. "People are quite open to consult or coach you before a project. So, then you can write a proposal and then you hire them once it is approved."

Coders donate their labor to civil society media projects

As the IT sector works mainly for the global market, media houses find it difficult to compete with the salaries paid in the industry. However, some specialists see consulting on media projects connected to civil society as part of their own civil society activism. "When we started and needed to develop our website, an IT firm gifted us a month of their labor," says Roman Danilenkov from Nakipelo. "This was right after Maidan and they liked what we were doing. Afterwards, we continued working with them on a fee basis."

There are hackathons where IT specialists and civil society activists come together, like the Open Data Challenge, to collaborate on data based solutions for societal innovation. In 2018, the competition had 190 applications from 27 Ukrainian cities. At the same time, there are many co-working spaces in Kyiv and other major cities of the country; UNITCity, in an old factory compound in Kyiv, is one of many important start-up incubators.

Business skills not taught in journalism school

Most of the research on journalism is conducted by non-governmental organizations like Detektor Media, instead of by the universities, says Koltsov, although there are some high-profile scholars at his own institution. While contemporary Ukrainian journalism is well analyzed, there is little research on the future of journalism.

A few journalism faculties include coding skills in their curricula, but that is very far from being the rule. At the same time, there seems to be a lack of instruction on how to use programming for journalistic innovation. Business and management skills are rarely taught, says Koltsov. "This is a big problem. When young journalists start a new media outlet, they think they have to do only two things: Write and distribute their articles via social media. But the problems start after that."

Recommendations

Management skills should be included in the curricula of journalism programs

Where possible in cooperation with the universities' business schools. Mid-career media managers should attend training programs to gain these skills.

CivTech community needs stronger connections between journalists, activists, and coders

Most innovation in the media landscape is driven by Ukrainian civil society.

Open Source is vital for their successful development

Especially for poorer regional media houses. They have a strong need for the creation of a vibrant open source community to help them surmount the challenging environment.

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