



81st International Scientific
Conference of the
University of Latvia 2023

MEDIA AND SOCIETY

2023

MEDIJI UN SABIEDRĪBA

Proceedings of Scientific Papers
Rakstu krājums



UNIVERSITY
OF LATVIA

February–May 2023

Media and Society, 2023. Proceedings of Scientific Papers = Mediji un sabiedrība, 2023. Rakstu krājums. Riga, University of Latvia, 2024. 108 p.



**UNIVERSITY
OF LATVIA**



**UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA
FACULTY OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**#STAND
WITH
UKRAINE**

The publication has been prepared with the support of the Scientific activity development project of the University of Latvia and the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia.

EDITOR

Vita Zelče, University of Latvia, Latvia

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Laura Ardava-Āboliņa, University of Latvia, Latvia

Solvita Denisa-Liepniece, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Latvia

Klinta Ločmele, University of Latvia, Latvia

Sergii Pakhomenko, University of Latvia, Latvia/Mariupol State University, Ukraine

Daina S. Eglitis, George Washington University, USA

Viesturs Zanders, University of Latvia, Latvia

Marita Zitmane, University of Latvia, Latvia

Publisher: University of Latvia Press

Layout: Ineta Priga

Translator and proofreader: Andra Dambergā

© University of Latvia, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.22364/ms23>

ISBN 978-9934-36-198-2 (PDF)

Contents

Preface	4
<i>Laura Ardava-Āboliņa</i> Media Literacy for Shared Reality: Different Discourses of the Project “Media Literacy and Information Literacy Classes in Educational Institutions of the Eastern Border Regions of Latvia”	5
<i>Aija Cepliša</i> Russian Journalists in Latvia Impacted by the Russian Invasion of Ukraine.....	12
<i>Tāivaldis Kronbergs</i> Translators and Translation in the Public Sphere in Latvia in the 21st Century	22
<i>Džeina Kusiņa</i> The Role of Social Media in Promoting Civic Activism in Latvian Society: Support to Ukrainian Society, Armed Forces and Refugees in the Context of Russia’s War in Ukraine in 2022	32
<i>Inga Latkovska</i> Strategic Communication and Its Application in Public Administration in Latvia. . . .	40
<i>Guntis Meisters</i> Communication of Female and Male Deputy Candidates on the Social Network <i>Facebook</i> During the Pre-Election Period of 14th <i>Saeima</i>	52
<i>Aloiza Meldere</i> Analysis of Latvian Celebrity Communication and Charity Concerts during the Fatigue Phase of the War in Ukraine (February–April 2023).....	61
<i>Silvija Rudzika</i> Representation of Socially Significant Issues in the Communication of Virtual Influencers on Social Medium <i>Instagram</i>	73
<i>Marks Skujiņš</i> Communication of JSC “ <i>Sadales Tīkls</i> ” and JSC “ <i>Augstsprieguma Tīkls</i> ” about Tariff Changes.....	85
<i>Vita Zelče</i> Media Generation and Media Consumption in Latvia in Autumn 2022.....	92
<i>Marita Zitmane</i> How It All Started. Discussion of Istanbul Convention in Latvian Daily Newspapers in 2016	101

Preface

2023 saw the 81st international conference of the University of Latvia, and this important annual event of the university's academic life provided an opportunity to present and discuss the latest research results, to share ideas, to seek solutions and to encourage creative activities. The conference programme consisted of multiple sections with participation of the researchers from the University of Latvia, other research centres of Latvia and foreign universities.

The current proceedings represent the collection of the best reports presented in the section of the media and communication science at the Faculty of Social Sciences. The focus of the section was the analysis of current and past information processes, the spread of disinformation, the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Latvia's information environment, the support of Ukraine, the events of donation to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, the work and life of Russian journalists in Latvia, the issues of artificial intelligence in the field of communication, as well as the role of social networks, and the issues of media literacy.

This collection contains 10 articles authored by experienced scientists and teaching staff, as well as representatives of the younger generation of researchers. Thus, the proceedings represent a good example of the synergy between professors and their students.

All the articles included in the collection are double-blind peer-reviewed, thereby ensuring their scientific quality and merit. We would like to thank all the reviewers for their work, substantive consideration of the manuscripts, and helpful advice.

We hope that these proceedings will bring a contribution to the field of media and communication publications and stimulate further research, as well as participation with valuable research results in future conferences at the University of Latvia.

Professor Vita Zelče
University of Latvia

Media Literacy for Shared Reality: Different Discourses of the Project “Media Literacy and Information Literacy Classes in Educational Institutions of the Eastern Border Regions of Latvia”

Laura Ardava-Āboliņa

University of Latvia

E-mail: Laura.Ardava@lu.lv

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5483-8744?lang=en>

Abstract. The current global direction of thinking in the field of media literacy and information literacy aims towards the fact that media literacy in society begins with the promotion of media literacy in the audiences of children and young people. The article is dedicated to various aspects of the project “Media literacy and information literacy classes in educational institutions of the eastern border regions of Latvia” of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, – a study of value to the Latvian society, implemented in the autumn of 2022 by the teaching staff and researchers of the Department of Communication Studies, the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia. In the current complex geopolitical situation, the project initiative is highly topical, focused and purposeful, because the attitude towards the Russia’s war in Ukraine at the eastern border of Latvia is ambiguous amongst different audiences, even within the audience of pupils. The voluminous, content-rich presentation reached almost 1000 pupils of 21 schools along the eastern border of Latvia.

Keywords: media literacy education, schoolchildren, Ministry of Culture, Russia-Ukraine war, Latvia’s eastern border

Introduction

The UNESCO global conference “Internet for Trust”, which took place at the end of February 2023 in Paris, has yielded an important conclusion – that media literacy should be taught to different age groups in different ways (one size does not fit all), and the most important thing is to focus on the audience of children and young people, because media literacy in society starts at this level. The conference panel, which was dedicated specifically to teaching media literacy to children and youth audiences, recommended that schools should attract young

people who are themselves organic social media users as guest speakers to teach media literacy.¹

The teaching staff and researchers of the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Latvia Faculty of Social Sciences have made a significant contribution to the promotion of media literacy in Latvian schools over the past year. Last autumn, a project by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia “Media literacy and information literacy classes in the educational institutions of the eastern border regions of Latvia” was successfully implemented. Within the said project, the researchers – Laura Ardava-Āboliņa, Klinta Ločmele, Anastasija Tetarenko-Supe, Velta Skolmeistere, Viktorija Tkačenko, Raivis Vilūns and Kaspars Līcītis organised classes for 993 pupils from 21 schools located in the territory adjacent to the eastern border of Latvia. The comprehensive presentation, developed by assistant professor and well-known media literacy expert in Latvia, Klinta Ločmele, was aimed at improving the media literacy and information literacy of ninth- to twelfth-grade youth in Latgale schools in the context of Russia’s military operations in Ukraine, countering the spread of disinformation, promoting its recognition and identification of the obvious risks.

Communication with Latgale schools and active planning of classes commenced at the beginning of the academic year 2022/2023. In total, almost 40 schools were approached. For the most part, school administration and teachers responded positively and welcomed the project initiative, stressing that they also devoted a lot of attention to teaching media literacy to pupils on a daily basis. However, there were also refusals from some schools on the grounds that “the topic is overly politicized”, “there are some pro-Putin students in the class”, or the reluctance to cooperate as such was expressed indirectly by not giving an answer or delaying it. This confirmed the necessity of the project, the need for the right focus and the appropriate moment of project implementation even more persuasively, because the attitude towards the Russian war in Ukraine in the territories adjacent to the eastern border of Latvia is certainly ambiguous even amongst the audience of pupils.

Methodology

At the beginning of the autumn semester of 2022, the researchers of the project “Media literacy and information literacy classes in the educational institutions of the eastern border regions of Latvia” searched for the schools located in the territories adjacent to the eastern border and retrieved their contact information using the social network of schools [Mykoob.lv](https://mykoob.lv). The researchers contacted these schools

1 More about the conference – on the UNESCO website: <https://www.unesco.org/en/internet-conference>

and planned the classes (the lessons). Almost 40 schools were approached, and the classes in form of guest lectures were conducted in 21 schools, reaching 993 pupils. An important task of the guest lecturers at the conclusion of each class was to obtain feedback from the pupils. After each class, the pupils were asked four simple but important questions and invited to raise their hands, if they wanted to answer in the affirmative: 1) Did the pupil like the class? 2) Would the pupil like to attend similar classes in the future? 3) Did the pupil know what the media literacy was previously, before the class? 4) What new, memorable things did the pupil learn? The last question was an open-ended one, providing an opportunity for the pupils to give their answers verbally.

Latvia's eastern border, problematic aspects and media literacy

The eastern border of Latvia is considered to be a part of Latgale region, located along the border of Latvia with Russia and Belarus. One of the most problematic aspects concerning the residents of this region has been the influence of the Russian media and the discourses created by them, which has even resulted in many of these inhabitants living in the Russian information space. With the beginning of Russia's war in Ukraine, this problem acquired the dimensions of a national security issue.

Latvia in general faces medium-level risks pertaining to media pluralism, although media policy in Latvia is oriented towards media pluralism. Media choice in Latvia is largely determined by ethnic group and geographical factors. Representatives of different ethnic groups in Latvia acquire their daily information from different sources; Latvians generally trust and use the media in Latvian, whereas the Russian-speaking inhabitants have preferred the TV channels controlled by the Russian government. The war of Russia in Ukraine has affected Latvian media environment, as the broadcasting of several Russian television channels has been officially banned in Latvia. The media environment in Latvia has always been divided into two information spaces (Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

As the geopolitical situation grew complicated, work and time spent with the school audience became essential, because media literacy in society begins here. Media literacy serves as a form of educational mediation that guides young pupils to consume the media critically and wisely. Over the years, media educators have developed different approaches to media literacy education. There are at least five media-literacy education approaches adopted by media educators in different countries and at different stages. The **approach of inoculation** aims at protecting young people against negative media messages. The **critical analytical approach** teaches young people to deconstruct the hidden ideology and the values of media messages. The **media arts approach** emphasises enjoyment

of the media. Media production and consumption are regarded as an interesting, creative, participatory approach. **Social participatory approach** focuses on letting active citizens play a constructive role in media democracy, whereas **reflective media production approach** is the combination of critical analysis and production. This approach stresses the importance of respecting young pupils' subjective media experiences and social backgrounds, allowing pupils to try producing and examples of media content themselves, on the basis of their own everyday life perspectives (De Abreu *et al.* 2017, 1–2).

Guest lectures within the project “Media literacy and information literacy classes in the educational institutions of the eastern border regions of Latvia” correspond to the critical analytical approach, as they aim to teach the audience of pupils the different ways and techniques of recognizing misinformation.

Results

When giving feedback at the end of the classes, the overwhelming majority of pupils found the class to be simultaneously valuable and interesting. 74% of the surveyed pupils responded that they liked the classes, 65% wanted similar classes in the future, while only 22% of the surveyed pupils answered that they previously (already) knew what media literacy was. The pupils noted that the most valuable newly acquired knowledge was related to deep fakes, hate speech, the possibility to check the authenticity of images on the Internet, as well as the operation of the *Tik Tok* algorithm – a process concerning the media platform of great popularity amongst the pupils themselves. In the class, the pupils also learned that “information on the Internet cannot be trusted”, “information must be verified”, “videos can be faked”, “*Tik Tok* has a lot of false information”, “that there are specialised fact-checking organizations”, “that deep fakes are created with the help of artificial intelligence”, “before sharing some kind of a post, you need to evaluate the information”.

The variety of attitudes towards the war in Ukraine in the schools of the Latgale region was extremely diverse – from openly unkind attitudes all the way to the presentation of homemade thank-you gifts in the colours of the Ukrainian flag. Thus, for example, lecturer Anastasija Tetarenko-Supe visited five schools in Rezekne. She experienced regional border issues and problems both in the audiences of pupils and teachers. She discovered the presence of an opinion “everything is not so clear-cut” in the young people’s attitude towards the current events – what is told in educational institutions and Latvian media often confronts what the children hear at home in conversations with their parents. Individual pupils and also an individual teacher questioned the work of Latvian journalists, saying that journalists did commissioned work, that they were paid for publishing a certain type of information, and made other similar statements.

4

LATVIJAS AVĪZE
Otrdiena, 22. novembris, 2022.

LATVIJĀ

Kad arī skolēniem "viss nav tik viennozīmīgi"

Latgales skolās pētnieki saskaras ar jauniešu dažādo attieksmi pret Krievijas iebrukumu Ukrainā

ILZE KUZMINA

"Prāts dažkārt ir pārāk silns, lai filtrētu informāciju, un tieši tādos brīžos mūs esamie dzīvojam informācija", tāds ir viens no brīdinājumiem, ko paši komunikācijas zinātnes maģistrs Kaspars Līcītis. Viņš ir viens no sešiem pētniekiem, kas Kultūras ministrijas (KM) un Latvijas Universitātes (LŪ) sadarbības projekta "Medijpratības un informācijprasības nodarības Latvijas austrumu pierobežas reģionu mācību iestādēs" ietvaros devās uz Latvijas pierobežas skolām, lai runātu ar skolēniem par medijpratību un informācijprasību. Nodarības notika 21 skolā, tajās piedalījās 993 skolēni no 9. līdz 12. klasei.

Medijpratība ir viens no prasmēm, kas ļoti nepieciešama mūsdienu cilvēkam. Jo sevišķi šobrīd, kad notiek karš Ukrainā, un saistībā ar to ir daudz dezinformācijas. Taču, lai veicinātu sabiedrības vienotību, nodarības tiek runātas arī par naidīgu runu: ar ko tā ir būtams un kāpēc tieši šobrīd būtu īpaši jāizvairās no kāda aizskaršanas, piemēram, tautības dēļ.

Uzkras pat pētnieki

"Latvijas Avīzē" bija kļāt viens no šādām nodarībām Preiļi Valsts ģimnāzijā, kur medijpratību apguvē piedalījās 11. klases skolēni.

Kā viens no bistamākajiem dezinformācijas izplatītājiem šobrīd ir saimniec



Lāčplēša dienā Preiļi Valsts ģimnāzijas skolēni piedalījās medijpratības nodarībā.

ILZES KUZMINA S FOTO



vērtē. Tomēr arī K. Līcītis izbrīnījās kāda skolēna jautājumus, kāpēc Latvija vispār nosaukta Ukrainas pusē, bet pētnieks to labprāt izskaidroja.

Vēl viena projekta pētniece, LŪ komunikācijas zinātnu doktora grāda pretendente Anastasija Tetarenko-Supe "Latvijas Avīzē" atklāja, ka viņa bijusi arī masārkaitēto skolās, un atsevišķos gadījumos nācies secināt, ka tur skolēni ne vienmēr piekļūst valsts noteiktajai par karu Ukrainā, par Krieviju kā agresoru. Nebūjusi gan tā, ka skolēni atdāli atbalsta Krieviju, taču vairākārt no viņu pusēs izskanēja, ka "viss nav tik vieno-

Tas, ka jaunieši nevarēs paust savu atšķirīgo viedokli, varētu liecināt par viņu cīņņu pārliecību un noteikta viedokļa domināšanu atsevišķās skolēnu grupās," secināja projekta pētniece. "Tāpēc šādās nodarībās lietotājiem piemēram par Krievijas lietotājiem dezinformāciju ir jābūt gataviem atklāti runāt arī par citām informatīvās kara ierīcībām, jo prečā gādījumā skolēnu un atsevišķos gadījumos arī pedagogu spēja uzturēt un ieklausīties šādos sarunās, iestājoties noraidošā un visu štatistiku apšaubošā pozā."

Vēl kāda nianse: kaut A. Tetarenko-Supe runāja latviski, skolēni itaļauki krieviski. Pētniece tam nav iebildusi, bažijoties, ka citādi viņš nelādā saruna nesākās.

Atšķirība starp latviešu un krievu skolām bijusi arī tāda, ka latviešu skolās skolotāji uzturēja projekta ietvaros, atstāja ar skolēniem vienus, bet krievu skolās nodarības laikā kļāt bija arī pedagogs.

Joprojām liela Krievijas ietekme

Tieši pierobežas skolēniem informācija par medijpratību visvairāk vajadzīga tāpēc, ka tieši austrumu pierobežā Krievijas mediju ietekme joprojām ir vislielākā, skaidroja K. Līcītis. Piemēram, Krievijas televīzija, neraugoties uz aizliegumiem, daudzinā ierīcībām

Figure. Screenshot of the press publication of a journalist of "Latvijas Avīze" newspaper on one of the guest lectures at the Preiļi State Gymnasium. Lecturer Kaspars Līcītis during his presentation

In her turn, the visits of lecturer Klinta Ločmele in four schools around Balvi generated a pleasant sentiment. At the school in Ruģāji, after the presentation she received hand-made wrist warmers in the colours of the Ukrainian flag as a gift. She values this as a very touching experience, because it was a specially prepared greeting of a warm, symbolic character – the warmth of the hands and thoughts about Ukraine were invested in making the gloves, including the consideration for Ukrainian people and their struggle for independence. Klinta Ločmele stored the present on the shelf as an emotionally valuable souvenir, but this gift also been useful in practice – in autumn, before the start of the heating season, while working at the computer, it warmed the wrists.²

2 More about the emotions engendered during the project: Ardaiva-Āboliņa, L. (2023). Medijpratība – vienotai realitātes izpratnei skolēnu vidū [Media literacy – for a unified understanding of reality among students]. *Avantūra*, 16, 14–15.

In general, the project's activities received positive media coverage on both national and regional media, including the periodicals, e.g., "Latvijas Avīze", in the afternoon broadcast "Pēcpusdiena" by the Latvian Radio, in Latgale regional paper "Latgales Vietējā Avīze", "Rēzeknes Vēstis" in both Latvian and Russian-language issues. It is significant that Ilze Kuzmina, a journalist of "Latvijas Avīze" newspaper, participated in one of the guest lectures in order to reflect this event in her report. The respective lecture took place on Lāčplēšis Day (a celebration dedicated to Latvian National Armed Forces) at the Preiļi State Gymnasium.³ It is significant that as the coverage of the project in the media increased, the schools' trust in this initiative did likewise, therefore it can be concluded that the media heightens the perception of reliability and trust of various activities in the society.

Conclusions

The project "Media literacy and information literacy classes in the educational institutions of the eastern border regions of Latvia" can be assessed as highly effective, because the attitude towards Russia's war in Ukraine on the eastern border of Latvia is really ambiguous even among the schoolchildren. Pupils use thinking frameworks that are likely to be acquired from their families or independent media consumption.

The diversity of collective memories and attitudes towards the war in Ukraine, which prevails within the schools of Latgale region, is further confirmed by the different attitudes that the project researchers received from communication with the schools. However, for the most part, the attitude of school principals and teachers was positive. They admitted that they also paid a lot of attention to these topics on a daily basis. A positive response was corroborated by the requests of several teachers to receive the project presentation for future use in the learning process, as well as the desire to combine classes, to give the opportunity for this presentation to be heard in the school assembly, thus gathering as many pupils as possible.

An important conclusion about the management of this project is that a well-considered and timely information campaign plays a very crucial role in successful implementation of the project. Gradually, as the coverage of the project in the media gained momentum, the schools' trust in this project initiative also increased, therefore it can be concluded that the media reinforces the perception of reliability and trust of various activities in the eyes of the society.

However, the war in Ukraine continues, and so do the opportunities for researchers to promote media literacy. The work of promoting media literacy

3 Kuzmina, I. (2022). Kad arī skolēniem "viss nav tik vienojīmīgi" [When all is not as "unequivocal as it might seem" with the students]. *Latvijas Avīze*, Nov. 22, p. 4.

in the schools of Latvia will by no means cease. Teaching staff and researchers of the Communication Studies Department of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia from September 2023 to May 2024 will implement an even larger project of the Ministry of Culture – “Media Literacy Classes in Latvian Educational Institutions”, which envisages performing extensive media literacy training for pupils throughout Latvia, augmenting the team with the teaching staff of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. The aim of the project is to provide classes in Latvian educational institutions, promoting young people’s media literacy and information literacy, raising awareness of disinformation, information security, new information technologies and innovations, algorithms and other topics. The aim is to visit 80 Latvian schools in less than a year.

This project, with its format of guest lectures and the goal of reaching as many pupils as possible in each of the schools, fits into the critical analytical approach to teaching media literacy. Still, it should be taken into account that in the literature of media literacy, the following processes are manifested and focused on reflective media production approach that combines the critical analysis and production of media content from the perspectives of the pupils’ daily lives. Notably, this approach requires systematic work amongst numerically small pupils’ audiences and is incomparably more time-consuming. Let this approach serve as a target for future projects.

REFERENCES

De Abreu, B. S., Mihailidis, P., Lee, A. Y. L., Melki, J., McDougall, J. (2017). Arc of Research and Central Issues in Media Literacy Education. In: De Abreu, B. S., Mihailidis, P., Lee, A. Y. L., Melki, J., McDougall, J. (eds). *International Handbook of Media Literacy Education*. Routledge, pp. 1–15.

Media Pluralism Monitor 2022: Full Report. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom. Retrieved from: <https://cmpf.eui.eu/mpm2022-results/>

Russian Journalists in Latvia Impacted by the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Aija Cepliša

University of Latvia

E-mail: aijaceplisa@gmail.com

Abstract. The aim of the research is to analyse the experience of Russian journalists who moved to Latvia after 24 February 2022, when Russia started a full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine, and who have since been living and working in Latvia. The theoretical framework of the work is based on three chapters, which examine the aspects of media accountability and influence, freedom of the press, and the work of journalists in exile. The qualitative research has been carried out, using a narrative analysis. Data was obtained with the help of semi-structured interviews. The respondents were found with the snowball sampling method. In the period from 23 March to 20 April 2023, ten semi-structured interviews with Russian journalists who have moved to Latvia after 24 February 2022, when Russia started a full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine, were obtained. The interviews particularly explored their motivation to move to Latvia, their working and living conditions in Latvia, and their opinion about the future of Russia. The results show that Russian journalists could not stay in Russia due to security reasons, and all the journalists reveal that it was their individual decision to move. They evaluate their work in Latvia as safe, but at the same time challenging, because they are no longer able to access local information of their former country, thus gradually distancing them from Russia. Examining these difficulties, the narrative analysis reveals that Russian journalists are concerned about their future life in Latvia, because they have not been issued with residence permits or work visas. One narrative condemns NEPLP (National Electronic Mass Media Council of Latvia) action in cancelling the license of the TV channel “*Dozhd*” (TV Rain). The journalists do not see a quick end to the war started by Russia in Ukraine and are pessimistic about Russia’s future development.

Keywords: journalists in exile, freedom of the press, media accountability, Russian journalists, narrative theory

Introduction

An old Soviet dissidents’ joke goes like this: “There is no news (*izvestia*) in “*Pravda*” and there is no truth (*pravda*) in “*Izvestia*”.” (Roudakova 2017, 4). “*Pravda*” and “*Izvestia*” were major newspapers in the Soviet Union, and

their names translate as “Truth” and “News”. Today’s media environment in Russia is likened to the model of authoritarian countries and the Soviet Union. The press freedom organization “*Reporters Without Borders*” reports that “strict laws restricting the work of the media increased after Vladimir Putin’s return to the Kremlin in 2012. Independent media were either subjugated and controlled, or their activities were significantly restricted. This did not apply to television, which was saturated with propaganda favourable to the president” (Reporters Without Borders 2023). Political scientist and long-time Kremlin researcher Lilia Shevtsova points out that it was the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that showed the Western world how Putin’s “propaganda machine” works. According to Shevtsova, although this machine was visible before the invasion, afterwards it completely took over the media space in Russia (Roudakova 2017, 17). The already dire situation rapidly worsened after 24 February 2022, when Russian troops launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, triggering the largest military conflict and refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. Shortly thereafter, on 4 March 2022, Law No. 32-FZ “On Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and Articles 31 and 151 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Russian Federation” was adopted. The law was dubbed the “fake news law”, because it stood against “discrediting the power of the state” and “spreading fake news”. The Russian government calls anything that contradicts its version of events “fake news”, while “discrediting” refers to any form of criticism of the government or condemnation of the war (Reuters, Vaganov 2022, 2–3). Violation of the law engenders severe fines and prison sentences for an individual journalist and repercussions against the media outlet. As a result of this law, many media outlets were blocked by the government or ceased operation, while numerous journalists left Russia to continue working from abroad. The editorial offices of “*Dozhd*” (TV Rain), “*Echo Moskvi*” (Echo of Moscow), “*Novaya Gazeta*” (New Newspaper) and other independent media left Moscow immediately. At least 1 000 journalists left Russia in 2022. A total of 250 journalists moved to Riga in the first months after the adoption of the law (Ruduša 2022). In the period until 2023, the “*Media Hub Riga*” foundation, which provides support to journalists in exile, has helped 507 journalists and their family members and given support to 29 independent media outlets.¹ Currently, approximately 300 Russian journalists live and work in Latvia. Russia’s “fake news” law and its consequences allow us to assess the concept of freedom of expression and to compare the media policies of a democratic and an authoritarian country, such as Russia. Putin controls the media in Russia, they are saturated with propaganda to his liking, and all other opinions are censored. Independent journalists, who continue to tell the truth, to criticise the government and to expose more and more of its

¹ See “*Media Hub Riga*” website: <https://mediacentre.sseriga.edu/media-hub/>

wrongdoings, are a thorn in the side of the regime. Although the new “fake news” law has forced the independent media to leave Russia, they continue their work in other countries, including Latvia. The aim of this study is to use narrative analysis to explore the personal and professional challenges faced by Russian journalists living and working in Latvia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. To this end, six research questions have been formulated:

1. Why were Russian journalists unable to stay in their home country and why did they choose Latvia as their new home country?
2. Do Russian journalists consider themselves as journalists in exile?
3. How has the daily working life of Russian journalists changed while working in Latvia?
4. What is the experience of Russian journalists living in Latvia?
5. Russian journalists’ opinion on the cancellation of the licence of the media outlet “*Dozhd*” in Latvia.
6. What is the opinion of Russian journalists about the future of Russia?

Methodology

Qualitative methods of data collection, processing and interpretation were used in order to carry out a qualitative study, to achieve the set objective and to answer the research questions. The data collection method employed for the study was the snowball method and a semi-structured interview, while the data was processed and interpreted through narrative analysis.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted between 21 March and 20 April 2023 with ten Russian journalists living in Latvia who moved here after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. All ten journalists admitted that their decision to move abroad was made in the context of the amendments to the law adopted at Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Five men and women took part in the study. A wide age range has been represented, with the youngest respondent aged 23 and the oldest – 65. The average length of service is 21 years, the lowest – four, the highest – 40. Eight journalists work for a news portal, one for television, and one for radio. Some of the respondents are colleagues, hence, the study comprises the total of six different media outlets. One respondent had left his previous job in Russia and shortly after the interview started working for the Russian version of a Latvian media outlet.

The respondents were found by snowball sampling, with each respondent recommending the next one. When addressing the respondents, the author of the study informed them about the purpose of the study, the questions and the expected length of the interview. The semi-structured interview was guided by previously prepared questions that were divided into three blocks: about the reasons for leaving, about work and life in Latvia, and about the future prospects

for Russia. The interview length ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, with an average length of 50 minutes. The data collection phase of the study was completed when ten interviews were obtained. Following the principles of the chosen method of analysis, the interviews were transcribed and then each interview was reread several times, extracting common narratives in the Russian journalists' stories.

Narrative analysis can be interpreted in its broadest sense as “narrative material analysis”, where different narratives revealed in conversations, interviews, texts and visual material such as photographs or videos are studied. According to Jerom Bruner, narrative is a way of understanding the world. Our lives are a series of stories that create an understanding of what is happening around us. Our memories, imagination, dreams and thoughts contain narratives that make sense of the world. Through narratives, we communicate with and understand others. It is a collective way of communicating (Seale 2018, 513). Catherine K. Riessman emphasises that narrative is the way we individually and collectively as a society construct self-identity. Narratives can move people to action, encourage change and change beliefs (Riessman 2008, 8).

Globally, narratives are meaningful, necessary and strategic. Consequently, this method of analysis is widely used in social science research, as it offers another way to study people and society. People's stories are their “maps, mirrors and reflections of experience”, hence, what they say must be seen as a single, event-centred account of their experience that allows access to them as individuals and as a group (Leavy 2014, 203). The narrative analysis of social science reached a turning point at the end of the 20th century. This was a time when different social groups were becoming visible in society, and research on the interaction of different races in the USA, femininity/masculinity, feminism and people in the LGBT community became topical. The social sciences have always studied people and their life experiences in the hope of understanding them. Narrative analysis helps to comprehend the context, to access intimate experiences and to discover the person. It can enable one to understand other people's lives, learn about the experiences of people different from oneself and bridge the gap between people (Leavy 2014, 211–213).

Riessman gave an example of a study that analysed the narratives of women who had abortions. The research revealed women's motivations, emotions and feelings, making people empathetic towards women who take this socially controversial step. While statistics would provide the number or age range of these women, the narrative of their stories provides an insight into their circumstances, reasons and emotions engendered by going through this experience. This method has also been used to study people growing up in dangerous urban areas, parents of children with learning difficulties or long-term unemployed. Narrative research looks at stories that have been lived and told. Through these stories, we may not only learn the stories of this group of people, but also get

to know and understand them. The benefit of this method is to be able to give people a “voice”, to believe in their stories and to access the thoughts and views of the people present (Riessman 2018).

One form of narrative analysis is interviews with people whose experiences are relevant to the research. Riessman points out that there are five steps in the process of narrative analysis: ideation, conversation, transcription, analysis and interpretation of experience. In her view, successful analysis requires the researcher to see both the “big picture” and the details. The researcher sets out by formulating an idea of what they aim to find out. This may be the experience of a particular group, or the view of an event from different perspectives. Riessman also draws attention to the role of the researcher in the analysis of the narrative. It is the researcher who, through their questions, determines what stories will be told. They are therefore encouraged to seek narratives from existing data, rather than to create their own. The resulting text must be treated as facts. After transcribing the conversations, the text is analysed, and the narratives found are categorised and elaborated. The final stage of the research is what Riessman calls the interpretation of experience, where the researcher must untangle the narrative from the data to produce a narrative that presents a chronological and personal account of a person or group of people (Leavy 2014, 211–213).

Riessman distinguishes between two types of methods: thematic and structural analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on what is being said. In contrast, structural narrative analysis focuses on the experience of the narrative itself, how it is presented and the experience of storytelling as such. Unlike contingency analysis, narrative analysis to a greater extent is aimed at ideas, experiences and thoughts. Narrative analysis leaves stories intact, while contextual analysis breaks the text into parts (Leavy 2014, 213). Although narrative analysis is used to study stories, the subject of the research is a human being, examining the person’s attitude towards something, their expression, message and response to a phenomenon. Thematic narrative analysis has been chosen for the current study because it enables assessing the experience of the Russian journalists, their feelings, fears, attitudes and values. This analysis enables understanding why the Russian journalists have moved to Latvia, their feelings about working and living here, and their thoughts about press freedom and propaganda.

Results

Summarising the data, the thematic narrative analysis revealed five main narratives: forced departure from Russia; life in Latvia; working conditions in Latvia; cancellation of “*Dozhd*” licence; and Russia’s future prospects. Examining

the material, it was concluded that the security aspect was present in all the narratives, and therefore it was singled out as a separate and unifying narrative.

1. Forced departure from Russia

In all the interviews with Russian journalists, it is clear that they could not remain in Russia, i.e., they had to leave. When analysing the answers of the respondents, the narrative of “we could not stay there” is prominent. All the respondents indicated that they had not planned or wanted to leave, but the actions of the Russian government had left them no other option. All of them openly said that the decision to leave was taken quickly, within a matter of days or a week, the main reasons being the outbreak of war on 24 February and the subsequent adoption of the “fake news” law on 4 March, which severely restricted their work in the profession. The journalists revealed that they did not anticipate or believe that the war would actually start, thinking that the government was bluffing or trying to intimidate the opponents. In their stories, the respondents revealed the reasons why they could not remain in Russia. Although the circumstances vary, the common thread is that it was no longer safe for them to stay in their home country to continue their work. The main motivation for leaving was to avoid unjustified imprisonment. This is particularly evident in the conversations with the five respondents who have been sentenced under the “foreign agent” law; they believe that staying in Russia or returning would be dangerous and pose a risk of imprisonment. The journalists do not see their status as “foreign agents” as extraordinary and do not highlight this in any particular way; they acknowledge that these are the rules of being a journalist in Russia.

2. Life in Latvia

The narrative about life in Latvia shows the respondents’ deep desire for security. Many stressed that the issue of private security was conclusive in their decision to move. They feel secure in Riga and Latvia, describing it as a safe environment, even conveying that, compared to Russia, it is a paradise. Several journalists point out that, unlike in Russia, there is the rule of law here, as it is impossible to be sentenced unjustly. Several respondents adhere to the narrative that they are not afraid of being prosecuted here. This was suggested in the context of mobilisation, and it comes up again in the context of private security. Alexander states: “in Latvia, you can express yourself more freely, without fear that tomorrow they will come after you. Or be afraid that your property will be taken away. There is private security here.” Ilona, speaking about Latvia, says something similar: “It is important to me that I will not be seized and taken somewhere I don’t know.”

All the respondents say that they are satisfied with the living conditions in Latvia. The respondents who live in Riga (including the one in Jurmala) describe Riga as a peaceful, cosy, green, small, historic and comfortable city, where it is easy to settle in and where they feel at home. The people are described as kind, quiet, and it is repeatedly stressed that Latvians are polite. The negative aspects of living in Latvia are the high cost of living and the limited entertainment opportunities in Riga compared to Moscow.

The respondents unanimously agree that “*Media Hub Riga*” and its manager Sabine Sile, who is known in the Latvian media as “the mother” of Russian journalists, have been a great help in their lives. “*Media Hub Riga*” provides all the necessary support to Russian journalists. The common narrative is one of immense gratitude for the support in ensuring the necessary conditions for working here. “*Media Hub Riga*” has created a sense of community, new contacts and friends. It organises events, celebrations and trips around Latvia. The support of “*Media Hub Riga*” is described as “invaluable”, while the people who work there – as “lifesavers”, without whom the Russian journalists “could not cope”.

3. Working in Latvia

A new narrative emerges in the Russian journalists’ answers about their work experience in Latvia, i.e., that distance has changed their work practice and reduced their contact with Russia. The journalists reveal that it has become much more difficult to write about events in Russia, as they are unable to witness these events, be present for interviews, gather opinions and observe what is happening there with their own eyes.

Until now, the journalists have been the first sources of information, whereas at present they must rely on someone else sending information from within Russia. Furthermore, the links with people have been lost, as it is impossible, for example, to go to a rural village to canvass opinions. Although all the respondents talk about this, four of them reveal that this distance has compelled them to change the focus of their activities, and they no longer write about the events in Russia. The remaining respondents continue to write or speak about Russian domestic politics, and obtain information from colleagues who have stayed behind. Noticeably, on this topic, the respondents do not go into details, because, as they admit themselves, their sources who have remained in Russia face the risks which they themselves have escaped by going into exile. If something happens to them, we will not be able to help, – they say.

The respondents confirm that they feel physically and legally safe in Latvia, but repressions from Russia continue in cyberspace. While most media have been blocked in the early days of the war, independent media are finding new ways to be accessible to their audiences. A safe alternative is the *YouTube* platform, which is used by several media outlets and is ironically called “the new Russian TV channel”.

4. Treatment of the cancellation of the licence of “Dozhd” (TV Rain)

Regarding the cancellation of the licence of “Dozhd”, the narrative that the channel did not comply with the Latvian rules is echoed in the answers of the respondents. They did not specify what these rules were, but rather explained that the local audience did not understand that “Dozhd” could not adapt to no longer being based in Moscow, where a different kind of journalism was needed. They described “Dozhd” as a provocative media outlet that failed to comprehend that it had a completely different audience. In almost all the conversations, the narrative was that the cancellation of the licence was an overreaction on the part of Latvia. Seven respondents expressed belief that the Latvian public would have benefited, had the licence not been revoked and the media outlet continued to operate in Latvia. ““Dozhd” would help to reduce Russian propaganda and the number of Putin supporters in Latvia.”

Overall, the “Dozhd” incident affected the sense of security of some journalists, who after the event began to fear that it could happen to the media outlet employing them. The respondents say that they have realised that Latvia does not forgive mistakes, and that a similar fate could befall any other media outlet. The journalists are comforted by the thought that not all media in Latvia are under the same spotlight, moreover, not all Russian media in Latvia are known here. The media representatives say that although they are competitors, they now feel united because they are “in the same boat”. Even the journalists who have not watched the content of the “Dozhd”, support the channel. All the surveyed journalists admitted that the event was unpleasant and certainly affected the attitude of the Latvian public towards all Russian journalists.

5. Russia’s future outlook

All the respondents are pessimistic about Russia’s future prospects and do not foresee any significant improvement in the near future. Most journalists contend that any changes in Russia’s course depend on the country’s leader. There are theories about what would happen if Putin retired or died, and also what would happen, if a more liberal-minded president came to power. Most journalists believe that Putin’s death will not change anything, because the Russian people will not be able to elect a democratic leader. There is a view that the next head of state will be just as authoritarian and that the change in leadership will make no difference overall. Several respondents acknowledge that the war Russia has started in Ukraine is not beneficial for anyone, but will continue for an unknown period of time. The journalists perceive the decision to go to war as illogical, incomprehensible and unnecessary. The respondents blame Putin for the duration and outcome of the war. Most are not optimistic and do not foresee an early resolution of the military conflict. As for the future of Russia, a new narrative of fascism in Russia is emerging. Due to the power of the Russian propaganda and

brutal war crimes, some journalists equate the Russian government with Nazi Germany.

6. Security as a shared narrative

The common narrative that permeated all others was security. This aspect motivated journalists to leave Russia and move to Latvia, and it was closely linked to their perception of press freedom. In the narratives, security was the main aspect that motivated the respondents to leave the country, because it was no longer safe to remain in Russia. All of them stated that they did not plan and did not want to leave their homeland, but they had to do it. The general mood was that they had to flee. Security was also a decisive aspect prompting them to move to Latvia to work; they described life in Latvia as safe and peaceful. Compared to Russia, the respondents can work here without fearing arrest.

As regards freedom of the press, the journalists pointed out that there was a certain correlation with security. Alexander explained this, as follows: “if I can write the truth and I am safe, then there is freedom of expression.” It can be concluded that the security of independent journalists, i.e. state protection, is one of the aspects pertaining to the freedom of the press. The conditions for journalists in Russia were not safe because they had no state protection, Putin’s censorship did not allow media that opposed the government. In general, the narratives of the Russian journalists show that they cannot work as independent journalists if they are in danger, hence, security is a very important aspect of their work and daily life.

Conclusions

Independent journalism in Russia has long been repressed, but after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the situation deteriorated rapidly. Any media in Russia that is not blatant propaganda is blocked, independent journalists are sentenced to harsh prison terms and forced to leave their homeland, continuing their work outside the country. The themes of media accountability and press freedom are very important in the study of communication, drawing attention to the quality of the information that the audience receives. The contemporary situation of Russian journalists in exile combines both of these theories. In this part of the study, it is shown that Russian journalists could not continue to work in Russia because there is no freedom of the press and freedom of expression. The media are unable to publish objective and truthful information, while the state administration spreads propaganda and censors the opposing views. The Putin’s regime controls the media space, leaving no place for independent media. Similarly, the conversations with the Russian journalists revealed that they were motivated to move by a sense of responsibility, which prevented

them from becoming propaganda mouthpieces or changing their profession. Thus, they continue their work by exposing the Kremlin's lies and calling Putin a criminal who is waging war, not a special operation, even if they have to move to another country to do so. Their responsibility to their audience and their ethics as journalists motivate them to continue their work, even if this means having to uproot their everyday lives, whether giving their cat to their parents or selling their flat.

Author's note. The current paper is based on a master's thesis developed and defended in the master's study programme "Communication Science" at the University of Latvia Faculty of Social Sciences. The research supervisor of the thesis is Assistant Professor Laura Ardava-Āboliņa.

REFERENCES

- Leavy, P. (ed.). (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Oxford University Press.
- Reporters Without Borders (2023). *Russia*. Retrieved from: <https://rsf.org/en/country/russia>
- Reuters, Vaganov, A. (2022). *Understanding the Laws Relating to "Fake News" in Russia*. Thomson Reuters Foundation and the Committee to Protect Journalists. Retrieved from: <https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Guide-to-Understanding-the-Laws-Relating-to-Fake-News-in-Russia.pdf>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. SAGE Publications.
- Roudakova, N. (2017). *Losing Pravda. Ethics and the Press in Post-Truth Russia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ruduša, R. (2022). Stratēģiskā viesmiliba: Kādēļ Latvija devusi patvērumu Krievijas neatkarīgajiem medijiem [Strategic Hospitality: Why Latvia Gave Refuge to Russian Independent Media]. *LSM.lv*, 7.okt. Retrieved from: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/zinu-analize/strategiska-viesmiliba-kadel-latvija-devusi-patverumu-krievijas-neatkarigajiem-medijiem.a476691/>
- Seale, C. (ed.). (2018). *Researching Society and Culture*. SAGE Publications.

Translators and Translation in the Public Sphere in Latvia in the 21st Century

Tāivaldis Kronbergs

University of Latvia

E-mail: talivaldis.kronbegs@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9840-2116>

Abstract. Translated fiction has had a special place in Latvian book publishing since its beginnings in the 16th century. It has not changed even in the 21st century. High-quality translation and publishing of fiction is still unthinkable without enterprising and responsible publishers, which attract highly qualified translators. However, due to the Internet and social media, in the 21st century in Latvia the translators themselves more and more frequently gain recognition in the public sphere. Without the mediation of publishing houses, translators communicate with readers both on the Internet and at various events, – these communications often include the issues related to translation (translation quality, new words in translations, training of new translators, etc.). In other words, translators are playing an increasingly prominent role in the book publishing cycle. The research revealed an abundant range of activities related to translators and translation, confirming the important position thereof not only in the book publishing, but also in Latvian cultural life.

Keywords: translators, translation, public sphere, Latvia, 21st century

Introduction

The theory of book publishing historically has considered the making of a book as a set of sequential steps as depicted, for example, in Robert Darnton's and John Feather's "communications circuit" (Darnton 1982; Darnton 2007; Feather 2003), without specifically highlighting the translator and translation. However, in the 21st century, the theory is also seeking wherefrom, how and in what way to depict the translator and translation, for example, Marie-Alice Belle's and Brenda M. Hosington's model for the study of printed translations in early modern Britain (Belle, Hosington 2017).

In the research dedicated to Latvian book publishing (hereby comprising both the book publishing in the territory of Latvia and Latvian publishing), there is no lack of studies dedicated to significant publishing houses, individual publishers,

or thematic publications, such as fiction, including translations from foreign languages. Likewise, the researchers have focussed on the work of libraries and their history. Admittedly, the translators (albeit an integral part of translation) are not particularly highlighted in the research of Latvian book publishing. Book publishing is not separated from literature as a cultural industry in general. Both the artistic and content quality of publications are evaluated annually. Although not regularly, the accomplishments of the translators are also assessed, thus highlighting the role of translation in Latvia and Latvian book publishing.

Research “Translators and translation in the public sphere in Latvia in the 21st century” (spanning the period from 2001 to 2023) is part of the master’s thesis “Translations of German fiction in Latvian book publishing from 1991 to 2000” (supervisor professor Viesturs Zanders) (Kronbergs 2023), which is the first attempt to examine German fiction translated from 1991 to 2000 in the context of Latvian book publishing. The material of feasibility research confirmed that translators and translation can be seen both as an increasingly prominent part of the successive stages of book publishing, as well as visible actors in the public sphere and field of activity. Published translated fiction continues its life for a long time both in readers’ homes and public libraries. The Internet enables continuation of the virtual conversation involving author, publisher, translator, and reader. Translators and translation are no longer an anonymous and unknown part of the creation of a book but are increasingly visible and understandable. The year 2001 was set as the reference point for the research – the beginning of the 21st century and the start time for the Internet in households.

Statistics show the numerical volume of work carried out by translators most accurately. “Data array on publishing activity in Latvia: 1991–2022” (Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Bibliogrāfijas institūts 2023) created by the Institute of Bibliography of the Latvian National Library is currently the most accurate source of information that describes the book publishing of Latvia in numbers. Statistics clearly demonstrate that translators and translation play an important role in Latvian book publishing.

From 1991 to 2022, 69 877 books have been published in Latvia (annual average – 2183 books), of which 21 061 books are fiction (an average of 658 books per year). The aforementioned data confirm that fiction makes up 30.1% of the total number of published books, and underscores its prominent place in Latvia’s book publishing after the restoration of independence in 1990/1991.

From 1991 to 2022, the translations of a total of 21 490 books (representing various subjects, including fiction) from foreign languages were published in Latvia, in other words – 30.7% of the total number of publications. The publications represent the translations from foreign languages into Latvian (more than 50 languages), as well as the translations from the Latvian language into foreign languages (1783 books), including fiction (215 books).

From 1991 to 2022, the translated fiction comprised 9 987 books in Latvia (14.3% of the total number of published books, 47.4% of the total number of fiction). The most popular source languages are:

- English – with 5310 books (7.6% of the total number of published books, 25.2% of the total number of fiction, 53.17% of the total number of translated fiction books);
- German – with 1181 books (1.7% of the total number of published books, 5.6% of the total number of fiction, 11.82% of the total number of translated fiction);
- French – with 781 books (1.1% of the total number of published books, 3.7% of the total number of fiction, 7.82% of the total number of translated fiction);
- Russian – with 589 books (0.8% of the total number of published books, 2.8% of the total number of fiction, 5.9% of the total number of translated fiction);
- Swedish – with 359 books (0.5% of the total number of published books, 1.7% of the total number of fiction, 3.6% of the total number of translated fiction).

As the data shows, the “source language leader five” of translated fiction occupies a dominant position with 8 220 books (12.6% of the total number of published books, 41.8% of the total number of fiction and 88.3% of the total number of translated fiction).

Summing up, it can be established that there is an abundance of translations, yet are the translators visible in the public sphere? Is their place in the book publishing cycle understandable, including for the publishers themselves? Are they valued by the public and/or those involved in book publishing? No less important is the question of whether it is understandable what translation is – how to ensure its quality (education, human resources, and time resources)? To acquire a comprehensive answer to the questions raised above, a much more extensive research would be needed, however, the obtained results outline the first convincing answers.

Results

Roberto Calasso (1941–2021), who was not only a writer and translator, but also a book publisher, said: “[...] A good publishing house is – if I may be allowed a tautology – like one that publishes, as far as possible, “only” good books. So, to use a simplified definition, books that the publisher is proud of rather than ashamed of. [...]” (Kalaso 2021). On the one hand, it seems that such criteria – “pride” and “shame” – are almost impossible to apply. On the other hand, the challenge of maintaining, evaluating and even increasing quality is

possible both in the book publishing in general and also in the work of translators. A proof of this is “*Zelta ābele*” (Golden Appletree) book art competition held by the Latvian Publishers’ Association (Latvijas Grāmatizdevēju asociācija 2023) since 1993, in which the prize-winning places have, among other publications, been taken by translations of fiction. Along with the optimism of the approaching turn of the century, in 2000, the Latvian Writers’ Union (Latvijas Rakstnieku savienība 2023) started organizing *Latvijas Literatūras gada balva* (The Annual Latvian Literature Award) – a competition aiming to provide the annual “evaluation of the literary creative work of Latvian writers and translators”, in which there is also a place for nominations in the category *Labākais ārvalstu literatūras tulkojums latviešu valodā* (Best translation of foreign literature into Latvian).

Not only the society of the 1990s, but also those involved in the book publishing have gradually accepted that part of the activities of the public sphere (communication) will take place in the virtual environment (in Latvia, the news portal “*Delfi*” started its work in 1999, and in 2000, the news portals “*TVNet*” and “*Apollo*”). In 2000, the magazine “*Grāmatu apskats*” (Book Review) published by the Latvian Booksellers’ Association, which had been issued since 1994 and was a regular source of information about the history of Latvia’s and Latvian book publishing, ceased to exist. It can be said that 2001, when the Internet gradually changed from an exclusive service to a utility for every household, marked a departure point for a new stage in thinking.

The beginning of the influence of social media in the first decade of the 21st century gave translators the opportunity to become visible in the literal sense of the word, moreover – this was a chance to communicate with readers without the mediation of the publisher and the usual (classical) media.

Silvia Brice, who describes the translator’s work: “A translator cannot live in a barrel and only peek through the spigot hole, then he will not know and understand much from the world he has to translate” (Dibovska 2021), has even published a book – “*Baigās piezīmes*” (The Crazy Notes) (Brice 2020) with texts created on the social networking platform *Facebook* (without the prior intention to collect and publish them in a single volume).

Apart from the activities already mentioned and continuing from the 20th century, the public sphere in Latvia in the 21st century has given rise to the measures encompassing activities such as translators’ public relations and promoting awareness of the importance of translators/translation, competitions as tests/certificates of language knowledge, competitions/awards highlighting translators and translation, and publications/books as a way to “capture” translators, translation and industry discussion. In the following material, some of the most important activities are listed sequentially by year.

Since 2001, the European Day of Languages has been celebrated on 26 September in 46 member states of the Council of Europe, in which “[...]”

special attention is paid to the diversity of languages and their learning [...]” (“LV portāls”/Latvijas Republikas oficiālais izdevējs “Latvijas Vēstnesis” 2021). In Latvia, the European Language Day is organized and coordinated by the Latvian Language Agency together with cooperation partners (Latviešu valodas aģentūra 2022), particularly noteworthy activities include an opportunity to communicate with native speakers, for example, during the events held in the European Union House (Eiropas Savienības māja 2022).

International Writers’ and Translators’ House in Ventspils has been operating since 2006, and the necessity of a residency for creative work can best be judged by its users, including translators (Ventspils Starptautiskā Rakstnieku un tulkotāju māja 2023). Notably, since 2008, when the residency in cooperation with the municipality of Ventspils created “*Sudraba tintnīca*” (Silver Inkwell) – an award honouring a work of poetry, prose or a translation to and from Latvian which has been created in this residency, the translator’s work is highlighted in a specific format of recognition, simultaneously strengthening the prestige of a good translation (Ventspils Starptautiskā Rakstnieku un tulkotāju māja 2022).

Since 2008, the certified translation office “*Skrivanek Baltic*” in cooperation with universities that offer education and develop research in the field of translation, implements “*Labākais jaunais tulkotājs*” (Best Young Translator) competition for Latvian students (Sertificēts tulkošanas birojs “*Skrivanek Baltic*” 2022b). Its purpose is “To promote students’ interest in the profession of translator, to introduce the work of a translator in a modern language service company”, and it should be noted that the source languages of student assignments are English, French and German (Sertificēts tulkošanas birojs “*Skrivanek Baltic*” 2022a).

In 2012, the German Union of Latvia, in cooperation with several institutions, including the Riga Central Library, implemented a cycle of meetings “*Restartējot saknes: es protu vācu valodu*” (Restarting the roots: I know German), the purpose of which was “[...] to promote the prestige of the German language in Latvia. At a time when English has acquired the status of the main foreign language as if it were self-evident, not only in Latvia, but also in other parts of the world, there are still people who also appreciate the advantages of knowing the German language” (Portāls “*Bibliotēka.lv*” 2012). In one of the meetings, the translator from German language, Inese Mičule, talked about her work.

“*Dzintara Soduma balva*” (Dzintars Sodums Award) in literature has been established in 2013. One of its goals is “[...] to popularize and support Latvian writing, promoting the development and preservation of the Latvian language [...]” (Ogres novada pašvaldība 2023), and the translators have been among its recipients. It was awarded twice to the translator Silvija Brice – in 2018 the first award was given for the translation of the German writer Günter Grass’s book “*Vonne Endlichkait*” (“Of all that ends”/“*Par beidzamību*”) (Ikšķiles novada pašvaldības informatīvais izdevums “*Ikšķiles Vēstis*” 2018), while the second award honoured

the book “Baigās piezīmes” – the translator’s debut as a writer (Kultūras un patstāvīgas domas interneta žurnāls “Satori” 2021).

In 2014, the Latvian Language Agency organized the conversation series “*Valoda tulkojumā*” (Language in translation), which was dedicated to translations of fiction into Latvian: “[...] Translators of works of poetry, prose, and drama [...] interpret the soulful experience of other cultures, while enriching their native language and trying to retain what has been expressed in another language. [...]” (Latviešu valodas aģentūra 2014). Notably, – and it can be considered a special case, – both the texts and photos of the aforementioned conversation series, as well as the reports of the European Day of Languages conference “*Valoda tulkojumā*” (Language in translation) held in 2014, are collected in the book “*Valoda tulkojumā. Intervijas. Konference. Diskusija*” (Language in translation. Interviews. Conference. Discussion) (Rožkalne 2015), thereby making a significant contribution to highlighting the importance of the field of translation.

From 2018 to 2023, more than 20 events were (and most likely will continue to be) organized in the museums of the Association of Memorial Museums – Andrejs Upītis Memorial Museum, Rainis and Aspazija House, Jānis Akuraters Museum (Memoriālo muzeju apvienība 2023), which focused on translators and translation, including the event series “*Svētā Hieronīma mantojums*” (Saint Jerome’s Legacy, meetings with translators) and “*Pasaules literatūras vakari*” (Evenings of World Literature, meetings with both translators and writers). Special mention should be made of the lecture by Ivars Šteinbergs “*Ieskats tulkošanas teorijās un atdzejas problemātikā*” (Insight into the theories of translation and the problems of poetry translation) held in 2021 (Memoriālo muzeju apvienība 2021).

In 2019 and 2020, the Goethe-Institut Riga implemented the project “*Übersetzungen entdecken*” (“*Atrasts tulkojumā*”/Found in translation), which focused on “[...] books, writers, translators, publishers and also readers. [...]” (Gētes institūts Rīgā 2023a). Since the published information is still publicly available on the Internet, it can be considered that the above project continues even now, for example, providing a wide range of users, starting with librarians and ending with readers in regions, with a useful selection “*Deutschsprachige Bücher in lettischer Übersetzung*” (“*Vācu valodā sarakstīto grāmatu tulkojumi latviešu valodā*”/Translations of books written in German into Latvian) (Gētes institūts Rīgā 2023b), which encompasses the information starting from 2000.

In 2021, the University of Latvia Press published the book by Andrejs Veisbergs, professor at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Latvia “*Tulkojumi latviešu valodā. 16.–20. gadsimta ainava*” (Translations into Latvian. 16th–20th century landscape) (Veisbergs 2022), which “[...] examines translations published in Latvian, mostly fiction. The main focus is on revealing trends and patterns, rather than analysing specific works or translators” (Kazakeviča 2022). It is the first collection of information, reviewing such an extensive time,

implementing a popular scientific approach and employing living language, as well as an analytically critical approach. The ability of Veisbergs to connect his field of research interest – translation science – with literary science, book publishing and general data, as well as the context characterizing the era is particularly valuable and noteworthy. Likewise, the concisely presented, abundantly collected information on translation reviews must be noted. Admittedly, compared to other chapters, the information about the 1990s is rather sparse and laconic.

From 2021 to 2025, the National Library of Latvia in cooperation with several institutions, including the Latvian Radio, implements the series of broadcasts “*Latviešu grāmatai 500*” (Latvian Book Turns 500), in which “[...] we highlight the most important processes that once set in motion the spread of the Latvian written and printed word” (Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka 2023). A significant part of the content consists of information about both the birth of Latvian book publishing and translations from the German language. From the perspective of popularizing science, including book publishing, the Latvian Radio broadcast “*Grāmatai pa pēdām. Latviešu grāmatai 500*” (In the Footsteps of the Book. Latvian Book Turns 500) (Latvijas Radio 2023) is particularly noteworthy.

Conclusions

The research dedicated to translators and translation in the public sphere in Latvia in the 21st century confirms the important place of translation in the cultural landscape of Latvia – forging the connection with the world, introducing the vastness of the world to “small” Latvia, fostering the exchange of ideas with and about others, as well as meeting the need of creating new Latvian words. Furthermore, it is advanced by the already irreplaceable impact of digital communication on working with the audience, attracting it to activities that take place in physical presence. The current research also confirms that it is always possible to create new ideas on how to work with the audience and promote its intellectual capacity, including understanding and perception of translated fiction. It is no less important that the ideas created in the 1990s and early 21st century continue to exist, moreover – thanks to the media in the digital environment, they acquire a much broader resonance than that which was made possible only by existence in print and/or by the means of radio/television (for example, digital public vote in the “*Zelta ābele*” book art competition or the annual competition for Latvian Literature Award).

Notably, translations constitute a valuable and irreplaceable contribution to the availability of foreign fiction in Latvia, as well as intercultural dialogue. Both studies and reflections on translations are also published in the books of “classical format”. The typographic presentation of the editions is of an outstanding quality and appreciated by the public. In the public sphere, events involving translators,

translation, and translations (especially fiction) addressed to different audiences appear regularly. Numerous translators (S. Brice, as well as Edvīns Raups, Dace Meiere, Kārlis Vērdiņš, Maima Grīnberga, Ieva Lešinska-Geibere, Guntars Godiņš, Ingmāra Balode, Mariāns Rižijs, Māra Poļakova, Dens Dimiņš and others) have become publicly recognised and frequently in the spotlight of media attention (even beyond the matters of translation).

On a downside, a topical question remains: is it really necessary to translate all the the texts that are being translated? Would it be possible to “improve” (to influence) the taste of readers, as well as the book publishers themselves, and with what financially supported tools? How to promote, for example, the wider translation of the fiction of a less “influential” (also – numerically smaller) language? In future research, it would be essential to analyse the quality of translations and, looking even more broadly, the book publishing as an important branch of Latvian culture. The quality of typographic presentation and design is praised, but is the translated content equally praiseworthy? The field of theatre and art reviews thrive in Latvia, but only in rare cases the reviews address the quality of the translation.

Author’s note. The current paper is based on the master’s thesis developed and defended in the master’s study programme “Library Science and Information” at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia. The research supervisor of the thesis is Professor Viesturs Zanders.

REFERENCES

- Belle, M. A., Hosington, B. M. (2017). Translation, History and Print: A Model for the Study of Printed Translations in Early Modern Britain. *Translation Studies*, 10(1), 2–21, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2016.1213184>
- Brice, S. (2020). *Baigās piezīmes* [The Crazy Notes]. Zvaigzne ABC.
- Darnton, R. (1982). What Is the History of Books? *Daedalus*, 111(3), 65–83.
- Darnton, R. (2007). What is the History of Books?” Revisited. *Modern Intellectual History*, 4(3), 495–508, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244307001370>
- Dibovska, J. (2021). Tulkotāju tur skaistas zelta važas. Silvija Brice [The translator is restrained by a beautiful golden shackle. Silvia Brice]. *Literatūras un filozofijas žurnāls “Punctum”*. Retrieved from: <https://www.punctummagazine.lv/2021/01/25/tulkotaju-tur-skaistas-zelta-vazas>
- Eiropas Savienības māja. (2022). Atzīmē Eiropas Valodu dienu ES mājas Valodu maratonā! [Celebrate the European Day of Languages at the EU Home Languages Marathon!]. *Eiropas Savienības māja*. Retrieved from: <https://esmaja.lv/lv/aktualitates/atzime-eiropas-valodu-dienu-es-majas-valodu-maratona>
- Feather, J. (2003). *Communicating Knowledge: Publishing in the 21st Century*. K. G. Saur, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783598440045>

Gētes institūts Rīgā. (2023a). Projekts “Atrasts tulkojumā” [Project “Found in Translation”]. *Gētes institūts Rīgā*. Retrieved from: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/lv/lv/kul/sup/uee.html#i6361181>

Gētes institūts Rīgā. (2023b). Vācu valodā sarakstīto grāmatu tulkojumi latviešu valodā [Translations of books written in German into Latvian]. *Gētes institūts Rīgā*. Retrieved from: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/lv/lv/kul/ser/uak.cfm>

Ikšķiles novada pašvaldības informatīvais izdevums “Ikšķiles Vēstis”. (2018). Dzintara Soduma jubilejā godina novitātes [Novelties are Honoured on the Anniversary of Dzintars Sodums]. *Ikšķiles novada pašvaldības informatīvais izdevums “Ikšķiles Vēstis”*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ogresnovads.lv/lv/media/120735/download?attachment>

Kalaso, R. (2021). Grāmatu izdošana kā literārais žanrs [Book publishing as a literary genre]. *Literatūras un filozofijas žurnāls “Punctum”*. Retrieved from: <https://www.punctummagazine.lv/2021/03/01/gramatu-izdosana-ka-literarais-zanrs>

Kazakeviča, A. (2022). Iznākusi grāmata par tulkojumiem latviešu valodā no 16. līdz 20. gadsimtam [A Book on Translations into Latvian from the 16th to the 20th Century Has Been Published]. *Latvijas Universitāte*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lu.lv/par-mums/lu-mediji/zinas/zina/t/74768>

Kronbergs, T. (2023). *Vācu daļliteratūras tulkojumi latviešu grāmatniecībā no 1991. līdz 2000. gadam (Maģistra darbs)* [Translations of German fiction in Latvian book publishing from 1991 to 2000 (Master’s thesis)]. Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo zinātņu fakultātes Informācijas un bibliotēku studiju nodaļa.

Kultūras un patstāvīgas domas interneta žurnāls “Satori”. (2021). Soduma balva literatūrā šogad piešķirta Aizpurietei, Bricei un Vigulam [This year, the Soduma Award in literature was awarded to Aizpuriete, Brice and Viguls]. *Kultūras un patstāvīgas domas interneta žurnāls “Satori”*. Retrieved from: <https://satori.lv/article/soduma-balva-literatura-sogad-pieskirta-aizpurietei-bricei-un-vigulam>

Latviešu valodas aģentūra. (2014). Latviešu valodas aģentūra aicina uz jaunu sarunu ciklu “Valoda tulkojumā” [The Latvian Language Agency Invites to a New Conversation Cycle “Language in translation”]. *Latviešu valodas aģentūra*. Retrieved from: <https://valoda.lv/latvieu-valodas-aentra-aicina-uz-jaunu-sarunu-ciklu-valoda-tulkojum>

Latviešu valodas aģentūra. (2022). Eiropas Valodu diena 2022 [European Day of Languages 2022]. *Latviešu valodas aģentūra*. Retrieved from: <https://valoda.lv/projekti/eiropas-valodu-dienas-pasakumi>

Latvijas Grāmatizdevēju asociācija. (2023). Grāmatu mākslas konkurss “Zelta ābele” [Book art competition “Golden Appletree”]. *Latvijas Grāmatizdevēju asociācija*. <http://gramatizdejeji.lv/nacionalie-projekti/zelta-abele>

Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka. (2023). Cikls “Latviešu grāmatai 500” [Cycle “Latvian Book 500”]. *Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gramatai500.lv>

Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Bibliogrāfijas institūts. (2023). *Datu masīvs par izdevējdarbību Latvijā: 1991.–2022. gads* [Data array on publishing activity in Latvia: 1991–2022]. Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka. Retrieved from: <https://dom.lndb.lv/data/obj/910822.html>

Latvijas Radio. (2023). Grāmatai pa pēdām. Latviešu grāmatai 500 [In the footsteps of the book. Latvian book 500]. *Latvijas Radio*. Retrieved from: <https://lr1.lsm.lv/lv/lr1/raidijumi/gramatniecibai-pa-pedam.-cela-uz-latviesu-gramatu>

Latvijas Rakstnieku savienība. (2023). “Latvijas Literatūras gada balva” [“The Annual Latvian Literature Award”]. *Latvijas Rakstnieku savienība*. Retrieved from: <https://www.laligaba.lv/index.php/lv/laligaba/par-laligaba>

“LV portāls”/Latvijas Republikas oficiālais izdevējs “Latvijas Vēstnesis”. (2021). 26. septembris – Eiropas Valodu diena [September 26 – European Day of Languages]. “LV portāls”/Latvijas Republikas oficiālais izdevējs “Latvijas Vēstnesis”. <https://lvportals.lv/norises/332865-26-septembris-eiropas-valodu-diena-2021>

Memoriālo muzeju apvienība. (2021). Ivara Šteinberga tiešsaistes lekcija [Ivars Šteinbergs online lecture]. *Memoriālo muzeju apvienība*. Retrieved from: <https://memorialiemuzeji.lv/events/ieskats-tulkosanas-teorijas-un-atdzejas-problematika>

Memoriālo muzeju apvienība. (2023). Sadaļa “Pasākumu arhīvs” [“Event Archive” Section]. *Memoriālo muzeju apvienība*. Retrieved from: <https://memorialiemuzeji.lv/pasakumi/pasakumu-arhivs>

Ogres novada pašvaldība. (2023). Ogres novada pašvaldība aicina pieteikt pretendētus Dzintara Soduma balvai literatūrā [The Municipality of Ogre Region Invites Applicants for the Dzintars Sodums Award in Literature]. *Ogres novada pašvaldība*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ogresnovads.lv/lv/jaunums/ogres-novada-pasvaldiba-aicina-pieteikt-pretendentus-dzintara-soduma-balvai-literatura>

Portāls “Bibliotēka.lv”. (2012). Tikšanās cikls “Restartējot saknes: es protu vācu valodu” [Series of meetings “Restarting the roots: I know German”]. *Portāls “Bibliotēka.lv”*. Retrieved from: <https://www.biblioteka.lv/tiksanas-cikls-restartejot-saknes-es-protu-vacu-valodu-articleitem-19368>

Rožkalne, A. (red.). (2015). *Valoda tulkojumā. Intervijas. Konference. Diskusija* [Language in translation. Interviews. Conference. Discussion]. Latviešu valodas aģentūra.

Sertificēts tulkošanas birojs “Skrivanek Baltic”. (2022a). Konkursa “Labākais jaunais tulkotājs 2022” nolikums [Regulations of the competition “Best Young Translator 2022”]. *Sertificēts tulkošanas birojs “Skrivanek Baltic”*. Retrieved from: <https://skrivanek.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Nolikums-Jauno-tulkotaju-konkurss-2022.pdf>

Sertificēts tulkošanas birojs “Skrivanek Baltic”. (2022b). Noteikts labākais jaunais tulkotājs 2022 [The best new translator of 2022 has been determined]. *Sertificēts tulkošanas birojs “Skrivanek Baltic”*. Retrieved from: <https://skrivanek.lv/konkurss-labakais-jaunais-tulkotajs-2022>

Veisbergs, A. (2022). *Tulkojumi latviešu valodā. 16.–20. gadsimta ainava* [Translations into Latvian. 16th–20th century landscape]. Latvijas Universitātes Akadēmiskais apgāds.

Ventspils Starptautiskā Rakstnieku un tulkotāju māja. (2022). *Starptautiskās Rakstnieku un tulkotāju mājas un Ventspils valstspilsētas pašvaldības balva Sudraba tintnica* [The Silver Inkwell Award of the International Writers’ and Translators’ House and the Municipality of Ventspils]. *Ventspils valstspilsētas pašvaldības oficiālā tīmekļvietne www.ventspils.lv*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ventspils.lv/starptautiskas-rakstnieku-un-tulkotaju-majas-un-ventspils-valstspilsetas-pasvaldibas-balva-sudraba-tintnica>

Ventspils Starptautiskā Rakstnieku un tulkotāju māja. (2023). Sadaļa “Aktualitātes” [“News” section]. *Ventspils Starptautiskā Rakstnieku un tulkotāju māja*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ventspilshouse.lv>

The Role of Social Media in Promoting Civic Activism in Latvian Society: Support to Ukrainian Society, Armed Forces and Refugees in the Context of Russia's War in Ukraine in 2022

Džeina Kusiņa

University of Latvia

E-mail: dzeina.kusina@gmail.com

Abstract. The aim of this research is to investigate the role of social media platforms *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram* in promoting civic activism of Latvian society in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022. The theoretical part of the research includes a description of social media usage habits, communication patterns of opinion leaders and non-governmental organizations on social media, communication flow patterns, as well as civic activism trends on and off social media. The results of the study were obtained through citizen of Latvia survey, content analysis of social media publications of opinion leaders and non-governmental organizations, and semi-structured interviews with opinion leaders Reinis Pozņaks and Tomass Pildegovičs, and representatives of non-governmental organizations “*Tavi draugi*”, “*Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem*”, and “*SOS palīdzība Ukrainas armijai*”. The study identifies the role of social media in promoting civic activism of Latvian society in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022, examines potential features of slacktivism, considers the aspects of social media communication of opinion leaders and non-governmental organizations and their role in supporting Ukrainian society, armed forces and refugees. Social media, as opinion leaders and non-governmental organizations point out, have played a crucial role in mobilising the Latvian public in support of the Ukrainian society, armed forces and refugees, and have been a key communication channel to reach and inform the public.

Keywords: social media, opinion leader communication, non-governmental organization communication, civic activism, donation, Russian war in Ukraine

Introduction

Today, the society increasingly expects top officials, organisations and peers to engage in civic activism and fight for the rights of vulnerable groups, animal rights, political issues, gender equality, community welfare and other important

issues. This trend can also be observed in the objectives of global organisations. For example, the United Nations (UN) has set seventeen development goals designed to make the world a better place (ANO 2022). These goals are also increasingly evident in corporate sustainability plans, thereby reinforcing the idea that the society now, more than ever, expects everyone to be involved in these substantial issues.

With the rapid development of the digital environment, the use of social media has increased worldwide (Chaffey 2023). Therefore, it opens up more opportunities to reach large audiences. This has given rise to the concept of digital activism, which allows the public to become involved in crucial issues on social media. The advantages of digital activism are the following: the activities require fewer resources to plan, organise and implement; they can be more spontaneous and can reach a large proportion of the public (Choo *et al.* 2022). These aspects were demonstrated when Russia acted in breach of the UN's sixteenth Sustainable Development Goal "peace, justice, good governance" and launched a full-scale war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Shortly after, social media users supported the victims in Ukraine by adding Ukrainian symbols to their profile pictures, sharing posts about the war, as well as the information about donations and other support opportunities.

While it is clear that public support for the victims of this war has been strong, there have been various studies on the possibility of engaging in social and political advocacy in a social media environment with little effort, which can potentially lead to slacktivism. Slacktivism is defined as "the willingness to show symbolic support for a social cause with relatively little expenditure of resources, and at the same time the unwillingness to make a significant effort to bring about meaningful change" (Kristofferson *et al.* 2014, 1149–1166). The question is therefore whether such small-scale social media activities contribute to civic activism or create the illusion of it. Social media users may feel that sharing information, adding Ukrainian symbols to profile pictures, responding to various posts on a particular topic may be enough to suggest that an individual has engaged in civic participation. This also crystallises the research problem – potentially misleading manifestations of civic activism through small support activities in the social media environment and their relation to the Latvian public's significant civic engagement activities in the context of support to the Ukrainian armed forces, Ukrainian society and refugees from Ukraine in the aftermath of the Russian war.

There have been various studies on civic activism in the digital environment and on social media, but no study has yet been conducted on the impact of social media on civic activism in Latvian society, specifically in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the role of social

media platforms *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram* in promoting civic activism of Latvian society in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022.

The study focuses on five questions:

1. What kind of content in non-governmental organization (NGO) and opinion leader publications on Russia's war in Ukraine on social media platforms *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram* generates the greatest engagement (in form of the shares, comments, *likes*) of the Latvian public?
2. Which social media platform (*Instagram*, *Facebook* or *Twitter*) has achieved the most extensive engagement with civic activism of the Latvian public concerning Russia's war in Ukraine?
3. From which social media sources (NGOs, opinion leaders, acquaintances, etc.) does the Latvian public most often obtain the information about the Russian war in Ukraine and the possibilities to support the Ukrainian armed forces, Ukrainian society and refugees from Ukraine, and what communication flows are generated from this?
4. How can social media be used to promote civic activism in Latvian society?
5. To what extent the slacktivism (small acts of support on social media but no significant acts of support (donating funds or supporting in other ways)) is observed in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine, supporting Ukrainian society, armed forces and refugees?

Methodology

The research part of the study consists of 1) identification of NGOs and opinion leaders, selection and study of the identified NGO and opinion leaders' *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram* posts on Russia's war in Ukraine and support opportunities through qualitative content analysis; 2) semi-structured interviews with the identified three NGO representatives and two opinion leaders, analysed with content analysis method; and 3) a survey to find out the civic activism habits of the Latvian public on social media in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine.

In order to find out the civic activism habits of the Latvian public in the social media environment in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022, a questionnaire with 23 substantive questions (20 closed questions and 3 open questions) and 5 demographic questions concerning gender, age, place of residence, nationality and education level was created. The substantive questions were based on the information presented in the theoretical part. The questionnaire was posted on the social networking sites *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram*, which also are a part of the research subject. A total of 233 questionnaires were collected and used for the analysis.

The opinion leaders identified by means of survey and opinion leader identification model (Bamakan *et al.* 2019, 200–222) were Reinis Pozņaks, Ralfs Eilands,

Tomass Pildegovičs and Monta Zaumane (Monta Talks Security). The identified NGOs were “Ziedot.lv”, “Tavi draugi”, “Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem” and “SOS palīdzība Ukrainas armijai”. Of these identified opinion leaders and NGOs, all were approached for an interview, with two opinion leaders and three organisations responding.

For the content analysis, 19 categories were created on the basis of the information presented in the theoretical part. To find out how opinion leaders and organisations communicated on social media in 2022 about the Russian war in Ukraine and support for the Ukrainian society, armed forces and refugees, the author set out to determine on which social networking sites the opinion leaders and NGOs posted, randomly selecting 17 to 20 posts from each, depending on how many posts about the Russian war in Ukraine and support opportunities, which the opinion leaders or organisations published between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2022. The publications that received the most reactions, comments or shares were selected. Given that not all the identified opinion leaders and organisations communicated on all three social networking sites in 2022, the publications were analysed only from those sites on which they were active during this period. The data from the contingency analysis was analysed and summarised in charts. A total of 335 publications were analysed.

In order to find out the expert opinion on the role of social media in promoting civic activism of the Latvian society in 2022 in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two identified opinion leaders (Reinis Pozņaks and Tomass Pildegovičs) and three NGOs (“Tavi draugi”, “Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem” and “SOS palīdzība Ukrainas armijai”) in the MS Teams platform environment via video calls.

Results

The trends in Latvian civic activism before and during Russia’s war in Ukraine in 2022 were defined by the means of interviews and surveys. The interviews with opinion leaders and NGOs have shown that Latvia’s civic activism before 2022 has been sub-optimal and the public has been reluctant to get involved. However, as shown both by interviews and surveys, with the outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the civic activism of the Latvian public has increased, with the Latvian public engaging in financial donations and humanitarian aid, volunteering, attending Ukraine support events, helping with refugee resettlement and transportation, and extending other forms of support.

In order to understand whether slacktivism is observed regarding civic activism in Latvian society in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022, each respondent’s social media activity was compared with real donation or support activities. After comparing the survey data, it was found that slacktivism was

only observed in the context of other support activities (volunteering, hosting and transporting refugees, finding work and school, etc.). This is due to the fact that other types of support require more resources, whereas, for example, donating money can take only a few seconds, indicating that the Latvian public is not always willing to make a greater effort to provide support.

Complementing the results with interviews of opinion leaders and NGOs, it has been concluded that slacktivism is not present in the civic activism of Latvian society in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine and the war as such, as in the context of this war it has been important to express one's position on social media and sharing information on donations and other support opportunities has been vital to mobilise the public. The opinion leaders and representatives of NGOs point out that slacktivism in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine rather is expressed as not sharing relevant information about aspects of the war and opportunities for donation or support, not expressing support for Ukraine and publishing information that supports Russian aggression. Therefore, any small social media activity that shows support for Ukrainian society, the armed forces and refugees is important in promoting Latvian civic activism.

The surveys showed that respondents received most information about donation opportunities on social media from the opinion leaders and NGOs, about support events on social media from the opinion leaders, many received information about other support opportunities on social media from the organisations, while most respondents learned about them from friends, acquaintances or colleagues and traditional media. Given that support activities such as net weaving, candle making and volunteering in warehouses require a collective commitment, this explains why such information is sought from those closest to the respondents of the survey.

Considering the content analysis data, it can be seen that in order to promote civic activism of the Latvian public in the social media environment, in the case of the opinion leaders, the best content is the real stories from people who have suffered from Russian aggression, the real stories from people who are engaged in civic activism in support of Ukrainian society, the armed forces, as well as the content with donations to Ukraine or assistance to refugees in Latvia. In the case of NGOs, setting specific goals works best – donations needed, targets for cash donations, specific locations for support, and other specific instructions for support. It is also important for NGOs' social media communications to show where donations are going in order to build a relationship of trust with donors and supporters.

The importance of social media communication conducted by opinion leaders and NGOs is also explained on the basis of survey data. The majority of respondents have followed opinion leaders as a direct result of Russia's war in Ukraine. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that the most important channel

for opinion leaders and NGOs in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022 to inform the Latvian public about the support needed (donations, volunteering, attending events, etc.) and to mobilise the Latvian public to participate, was social media. The findings of the research show that opinion leader and NGO social media communication has been a key component in promoting civic activism of the Latvian public in 2022 in support of the Ukrainian society, armed forces and refugees.

The sources of information from which the NGOs have obtained information about the war and the need for support before sharing it on social media are other organisations, as well as Ukrainian people in the war zone in Ukraine and in Latvia. Opinion leaders also obtain the support-related information from Ukrainian people, organisations and other opinion leaders, but information on war and security aspects comes from the media and other experts. As a result, in the context of Russia’s war in Ukraine, a multi-step communication flow is emerging, which means that information is not only passed from one source to another, but also interpersonal communication and links between them are being established (Ognyanova 2017, 1–10).

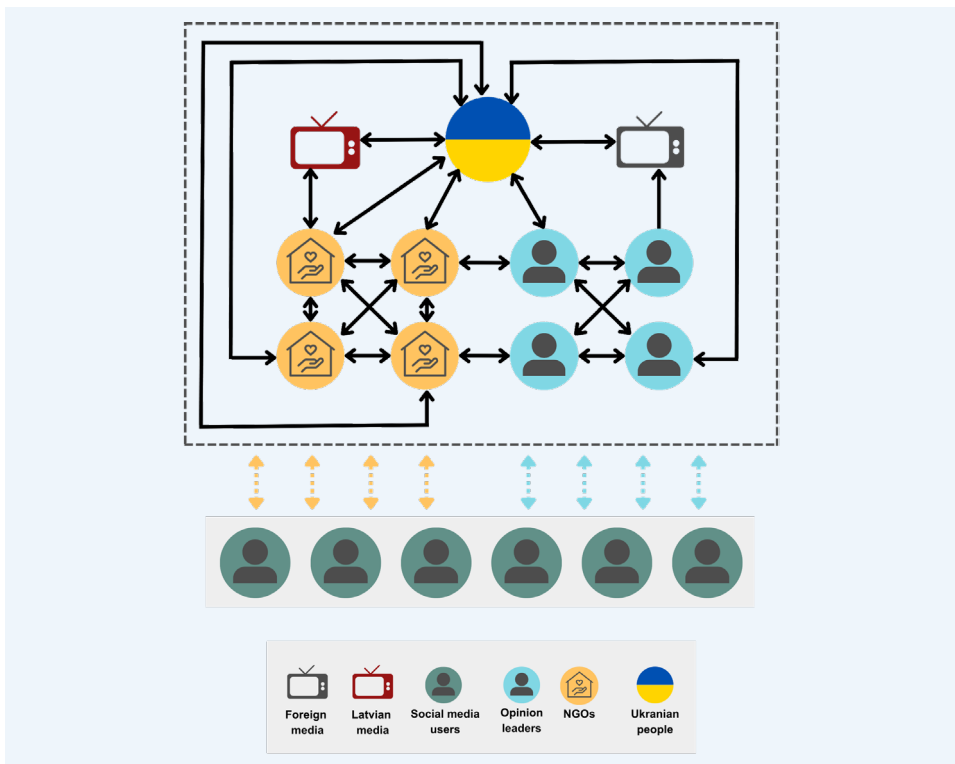


Figure 1. Identified NGO and opinion leader communication flow model in context of Russian war in Ukraine in 2022

Conclusions and discussion

After conducting research data analysis, it was concluded that opinion leaders and NGOs have been the most important sources of information on social media in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022, providing the public with information on opportunities how to donate or support Ukrainian society, armed forces and refugees, as well as informing the public about the ongoing events of Ukraine support. Social media users have not only asked the opinion leaders and NGO representatives questions in public comments, but also privately, inquiring about various aspects of the war and aid, which reinforces the importance of opinion leaders and NGOs in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Besides, each of the sources has their own main role. The main role of opinion leaders in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine is to educate the public through communication, to change public perceptions or to reinforce the importance of supporting Ukrainian society, the armed forces and refugees, while the main role of NGO communication is to mobilise the public and call for active participation. In addition, community building has been identified as the most critical component of social media communication by opinion leaders and NGOs in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. A sense of community, as NGO representatives point out, is one of the main reasons why Latvian communities volunteer in support of Ukrainian society, armed forces and refugees.

After finalizing this research, it is evident that without social media communication the support of Latvian society concerning the assistance for mitigating the consequences of Russian war in Ukraine in 2022 would not be as large as it has been. Therefore, social media, especially the communication upheld by opinion leaders and NGOs, have a crucial role in order to promote civic activism in Latvian society.

This research is a contribution to communication science, specifically political and public relations communication. It is useful not only for NGOs and opinion leaders who communicate in social media environment on the aspects of war and donation/support opportunities, but also for other institutions (PR agencies, governmental institutions, etc.) that develop social campaigns which include donation or other forms of support. The current research would benefit from a longitudinal study exploring the role of social media in promoting civic activism among Latvian society in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2023, which would yield the data that could be compared to 2022 results.

Author's note. The current paper is based on the master's thesis developed and defended in the master's study programme "Communication Science" at the University of Latvia Faculty of Social Sciences. The research supervisor of the thesis is Assistant Professor Klinta Ločmele.

REFERENCES

- ANO (2022). *Ilgspējīgas attīstības mērķi* [Sustainable Development Goals]. Retrieved from: <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/lv/attistibas-planosana-latvija/ano-ilgtspējigas-attistibas-merki>
- Bamakan, H. M. S., Nurgaliev, I., Qu, Q. (2019). Opinion Leader Detection: A Methodological Review. *Expert Systems with Applications*, 11, 200–222, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2018.07.069>
- Chaffey, D. (2023). Global Social Media Statistics Research Summary 2023. *Smart Insights*, Jan. 30. Retrieved from: <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research>
- Choo, K. Y., Azzouz, M., Savla, K. (2022). Youth Trends in Activism and Civic Space Expansion. *Civicus Youth*, August. Retrieved from: https://civicus.org/documents/Youth_Trends_In_Activism.pdf
- Kristofferson, K., White, K., Peloza, J. (2014). The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(6), 1149–1166, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/674137>
- Ognyanova, K. (2017). Multistep Flow of Communication: Network Effects. In: Roessler P., Hoffner, C., Van Zoonen, L. (eds). *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 1–10.

Strategic Communication and Its Application in Public Administration in Latvia

Inga Latkovska

University of Latvia

E-mail: inga.latkovska@lu.lv

Abstract. Strategic communication research has received increased attention during the last 10–15 years, predominantly viewing it as an interdisciplinary concept and employing various theoretical concepts as a basis for research – communication and media theories, organizational and management theories, as well as sociological and political science theories. Strategic communication is still used in different senses and meanings, however, most frequently it is applied as a synonym for purposeful management of the communication process in general, or management of specific communication disciplines. The most important aspect in this is being *purposeful* and tied to the strategic goals of the organization. Public sector organizations manage, lead and ensure the functionality of the public sector and provide services to citizens, including supplying the information process. In the tense situation of today, strategic communication is especially important for public administration in the context of ensuring national security. Latvia has a relatively good experience in this regard due to “The National Concept on Strategic Communication and Security of the Information Space 2023–2027” approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia in early 2023. The concept has been approved, but, of course, it is impossible to fully implement the concept in less than a year. Nevertheless, the Department of the Strategic Communication Coordination of the State Chancellery is actively working to make strategic communication an understandable, valued and professionally performed public administration function.

Keywords: strategic communication, communication, public administration, rights of an individual

Introduction

The task of public administration is to ensure communication that secures people’s awareness of public administration issues and involves the society in this communication, complying with the institutional and organizational goals of public administration. The communication process must be part of the public

sector's strategy and the communication itself must be strategic. Public sector organisations can be perceived as a means of achieving policy goals and priorities, and much of what the public sector does is deliberation, negotiation, compromise, and the communication of decisions made by policy-makers. Considering that public trust in public administration as a reliable source of information has become increasingly important in recent years, especially in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine and due to disinformation, questions are being raised about the capacity of those implementing the communication function of public administration to manage it at a strategic level.

Strategic communication as a theoretical concept within the last 15 years has been studied purposefully. The publication "Defining Strategic Communication" of March 2007 in *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, introduced the research and discussion of the concept. The publication so far has more than 1 000 references in other studies and publications related to the research of the topic (Hallahan, Holtzhausen *et al.* 2007). The term "strategic communication" makes sense as a unifying framework for analysing communications by organisations due to several reasons.

It can be observed that among communicators and in the professional environment in general, the opportunities to see, recognize and separate traditional communication activities and their effects from other communication activities are decreasing. Communication tools traditionally attributed to, for example, advertising – paid publications in the media – are increasingly used in public relations. And *vice versa* – marketing disciplines use more "classical" means, for example, public relations tools, such as events. As the situation changes, so does the after-effect of the used communication tools. Important changes in public communication are driven by technology and media economics, as well. On the World Wide Web, it is almost impossible to distinguish between sponsored publicity and professional media publicity. The creation of such communication products requires special writing skills, which are already included in study programmes in the mid-2000s. In fact, it speaks of postmodernism in communication. The need for what the organization's stakeholders, audiences know about the organization, how people feel, think and act in relation to the organization has not lost its importance. This sum of experience, which is of interest to the organization, is formed under the influence of various circumstances. Thus, the impact of direct communication is increasingly questioned. People do not always discern various types of communication, for example, they do not distinguish between an article created by a journalist and an article for advertising. And finally, strategic communication clearly recognizes that the fundamental purpose of organizational communication is influence, while some of the communication disciplines are focused on providing information or building relationships. Therefore, research should focus on what role and how

exactly communication contributes to the achievement of the organization’s goal (Hallahan, Holtzhausen *et al.* 2007, 10–11).

The purpose of the current study was to identify and appraise the research and publications on strategic communication, as well as to examine the situation of strategic communication in the public administration of Latvia.

The results

There is a jungle of flourishing concepts describing communication that are used as mutually synonymous. Amongst practitioners, it is common to understand that strategic communication includes management of all communication disciplines and activities in an organization. The problem with the traditional understanding of strategic communication is that it explicitly focuses on communication *per se* and the various activities linked to it (Falkheimer, Heide 2023, 85–113). Strategic communication as a research field is the study of organizations’ communication that includes several communication disciplines, for example, public relations, corporate communication, marketing communication, organizational communication and others. Only by respecting and being inspired by various forms of communication and disciplines can one comprehensively look at the concept of strategic communication. In addition to communication disciplines, sociological, organizational and management theories can contribute to the understanding of the concept, just as importantly, and remembering that in strategic communication it is crucial to know the public’s opinion, accurately use the management of organizations, etc. (Falkheimer, Heide 2023, 108). See Figure 1.

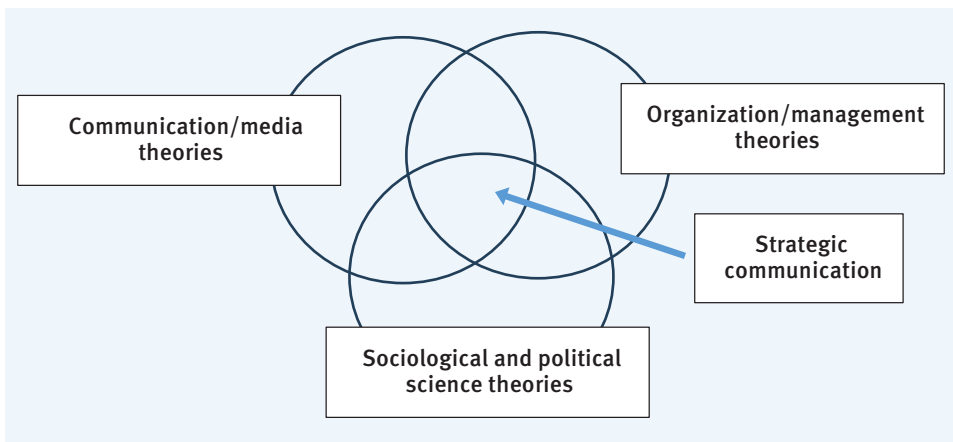


Figure 1. Relationship to other disciplines. Source: Falkheimer, Heide 2023, 108

From the outset, the development of strategic communication as an academic discipline has been an interdisciplinary project rather than creating a catch-all name for communication practice (Hallahan, Holtzhausen *et al.* 2007, 3–5). Globally, communication is practiced in many different contexts and called by different names. For example, public relations is also an ambiguously evaluated practice, 61.3% of professionals believe that naming public relations as strategic communication would be an appropriate practice designation (Zerfass, Verhoeven *et al.* 2011, 21–28).

“Strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission” (Hallahan, Holtzhausen *et al.* 2007, 3) with the task of creating added value to communication, for example, a communication that strengthens the organization’s mission is undeniably a strategic communication that helps bring the organization’s goal closer. At the same time, every organization is a part of society, a social member of society, and also in this aspect the communication can be viewed holistically – as inseparable from other activities and the society of the organization, within which the organization shows itself with purposeful and deliberate action, its managers and employees communicate. Hence, communicate strategically. This communication builds meaning, trust, reputation, and manages symbolic relationships with internal and external stakeholders to support organizational growth and freedom of action (Grunig, Grunig *et al.* 2002, 30–32).

A communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach the set goals. Goals can be as diverse as winning market share, gaining victory in a political campaign, building a positive reputation, or effecting social change. In that sense, strategic communication is the practice of deliberative and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals (Holthauzen, Zerfass 2013, 74). The definition emphasises the strategic communication as a process that follows from organization’s strategic plan and focuses on the role of communication in enabling organization’s goals and objectives. Likewise, it is one of the communication tools for achievement of the set goals. During the strategic communication process, the meaning of the communication is created in interaction with stakeholders, media, as well as other external actors in public sphere. The last, but not least – strategic communication entails presenting and promoting organizational goals, instead of creating or recreating them. The inclusion of the public sphere in the definition of strategic communication is valuable when discussing the role of practice. In addition to many other tasks of strategic communication specialists, the description of their duties must necessarily include helping others to access the public sphere by using good, well-thought-out arguments, the formation of which can contribute to the capabilities

of the communication unit itself and at the same time raise the level of public awareness.

Communicative entities can encompass the full spectrum of economic and social sectors, such as trade and industry politics, non-profit sphere, government agencies, activist groups, and even celebrities in the sports and entertainment industries. “Strategic communication is a purposeful use of communication by organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals, and it encompasses all communication that is substantial for the survival and sustained success of an entity. Specifically, strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals” (Zerfass, Verčič 2018, 493). The definition describes alignment of strategic communication both as an outcome and an ongoing process, furthermore, it introduces a distinction between primary and secondary alignment. It also highlights the importance of professional and organized communication and emphasizes the need for strategic communication to be institutionalized and integrated into decision-making and planning process.

Van Ruler says: “the concept of “strategic communication” suggests that not all communication can be seen as strategic [...] communication is only strategic when it has a certain quality. When attempting to define a field, this is problematic” (Ruler 2018, 13). Observing the management of the communication process, including strategy creation, implementation, evaluation and, especially importantly, context creation in the strategy process, – strategy can be considered in that aspect – Van Ruler calls it “a continuous, reflective learning loop” (Ruler 2018, 12). Strategic communication focuses on how organizations purposefully use communication to accomplish their mission. Unlike communication in the traditional sense, where operational actions and short-term results are more important, in strategic communication organizations focus on thoughtful management of a set of communication processes.

The process of strategic communication itself includes various elements of communication that characterize this concept not only at the theoretical level, but also in practice. The function of strategic communication is to strengthen a centralized and coordinated approach to communication in the public sector, creating the possibility of such communication practice that supplies complete information with the aim of providing a quick and efficient solution to issues of importance to society, including the ongoing processes in the information space. Ensuring this requires strategic and coordinated actions of all involved parties, including the management and use of communication processes to achieve and explain the set goals. Several researchers in strategic communication primarily point to the need for management elements or the management perspective in its understanding, others emphasize the organizational communication perspective,



Figure 2. Levels of strategic communication

stating that one of the key elements of strategy is dialogue. From this point of view, strategic communication can be understood as one-way manipulation and persuasion (Falkheimer, Heide 2022, 105–108). However, such a view does not allow highlighting the complex nature of organizational communication. Only by looking at strategic communication from different perspectives – communication and media, sociology, organization and management theories – is it possible to obtain a holistic and true understanding (Hallahan, Holtzhausen *et al.* 2007, 10).

Three hierarchical and nested levels of analysis could be applied in studying the strategic communication: the macro or societal level, the meso or organizational level, the micro or communication level (Holtzhausen, Fullerton *et al.* 2021, 20–24). See Figure 2.

The Terminology Working Group of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence defines strategic communication as a holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that includes everything a communicator does to achieve goals in a competitive environment (Bolt, Stolze *et al.* 2023, 19). Strategic communication is strategic because it focuses on long-term discourse change; it is strategic because it navigates in a dynamic and competitive information environment; it is strategic in that tactics must be coherent and consistent in a strategy that evolves as the best intentions of planners are confronted with the impact of real events. Strategic communication is based on 3 principles: (1) strategic communication respects the individual’s right to choose between competing ideas or to reject them; (2) strategic communication respects the principle of transparency of information and foresees the responsibility of communication specialists for this; (3) strategic communication respects the individual’s right to freedom of speech.

The objectives of strategic communication focus on four important fields of communication: organizational effectiveness, for example, the knowledge about communication provided to the stakeholders of the organization will contribute to the effectiveness of the organization – the stakeholders will use the best channels to convey the message; ensuring the principles of openness and transparency in communication, which includes openness of information between the organization, its stakeholders and the external environment; the formation of organizational identity, which focuses on the formation of identity for employees, is linked to the organizational culture, values and understanding of common goals; organizational image formation, which focuses on how the organization is perceived, what associations its performance provides, what the public knows about the organization as a whole (Falkheimer, Heide 2023, 196–198).

Communication is at the heart of an organization's existence and performance. Likewise, it plays an important role in the process of reaching organizational goals. Strategic communication is not limited to the activities of communication practitioners; strategic communication practices, as noted above, build meaning, trust and reputation, and manage symbolic relationships between internal and external stakeholders to ensure organizational growth and enable the freedom to deliver necessary activities. This largely applies to any kind of external communication, as well as internal communication, or communication with employees who are representatives of the organization and contacts for many different interested parties. At the same time, it does not mean that the understanding of the importance of communication among all the stakeholders, including the internal stakeholders of the organization, such as managers, is similar and truly valued. It is important to find out how communication professionals are perceived by the management and how they evaluate their competence in contributing to the achievement of strategic goals, and whether they are ready to invite communication professionals in the strategic decision-making process.

Opinions on the evaluation of strategic communication differ, however, the most important questions of the discussion are how strategic communication is understood and how the practice of strategic communication is integrated in the process of achieving the organization's goals. Earlier studies have focused on how top management and/or communication practitioners in organizations perceive the value of communication. The value of communication in an organization is highly dependent on the knowledge, beliefs and expectations of managers and other employees about what communication can provide. It is top managers who may or may not provide communication practitioners with the kind of influence that enables action. Moreover, even if communication is valued in the organization as important, there is a gap between this perception and the slow development of a professional communication department and the inclusion of strategic communication at the management level. In a study of

managers' and board members' perceptions and expectations of communication's contribution to organizational success, researchers concluded that advanced strategic communication visions developed in academia and practice have not yet reached many boardrooms (Zerfass, Sherzada, 2015, 13–15).

There are various methods of evaluating communication practices, including strategic communication evaluation methods. One of them is the Communication Maturity Index (Johansson, Grandien *et al.* 2019), where the communication practice in the organization is evaluated according to four levels of maturity – immature, in the process of development, established and mature. Such levels are determined by analysing 6 main theoretical and practical aspects of strategic communication: “(1) communication understanding among key stakeholders of the communication function and the value of communication to the organization [...]; (2) communication function – the comprehensive approach to work with internal and external communication [...]; (3) communication prerequisites such as budget and the number of people working in communications as well as time devoted to communication activities for managers and employees [...]; (4) communication organization – how communication work is organized and how the organization work integrated and specialized with communication issues [...]; (5) communication competence such as skills, education of key personnel as well as the need for training [...]; (6) communication practices and assessment methods” (Johansson, Grandien *et al.* 2019, 4–10).

A communication maturity model with adapted assessment criteria in addition to the Maturity Model and the evaluation criteria offered in the OECD Report on Public Communication, for example, including digital communication as one of the elements of the Communication Maturity Index, has been used for the analysis of the strategic communication by the British government (OECD 2023).

Application of strategic communication in public administration in Latvia

Public communicators are facing an increasingly complex information environment brought on by the rapid technological changes, which have provided both novel opportunities and unprecedented challenges. These evolutions have connected individuals around the world, facilitated their ability to create and share information, and helped social movements to broaden their reach. At the same time, online and social media platforms are undermining the role of traditional media and have facilitated the unparalleled speed and scale of the spread of mis- and disinformation in ways that undermine trust, public discussion and democratic engagement. Russia's full scale invasion in Ukraine has raised the issue of disinformation, the role of strategic communication in public administration and the role of information for the national security.

For the first time in the history of Latvia in January 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia approved the “The National Concept on Strategic Communication and Security of the Information Space 2023–2027” (hereinafter – the Concept). Here, strategic communication is defined as a strategic, planned, targeted and coordinated application of all available communication means to achieve the strategic objectives of the institution and the state (Cabinet of Ministers 2023). The development of a uniform strategic communication capacity of the public administration and information space security monitoring structure, and a model of coordination mechanism, as well as strengthening of the national strategic communication capacity and the security of the information space are determined by the National Security Concept, the Comprehensive State Defence Concept and the National Defence Concept (Saeima 2019, 2020; Aizsardzības ministrija 2019).

The vision of “the Concept is to contribute to the security of the information space, including through strategic communication, ensuring that public administration and society are resilient to external and internal risks of interference in democratic processes and information space, and able to participate effectively in managing crises and threats. The Concept is intended to promote resilience of the public administration and society of Latvia against various manipulations, including disinformation and information influence operations, in the context of Russia’s war, by strengthening all three pillars of information space security over the next five years: national strategic communication capabilities, media environment, media and information literacy” (Cabinet of Ministers 2023).

The model for coordination of strategic communication and security of the information space presented by the Concept can be applied to day-to-day situations, as well as in case of crisis and threats, and specific measures will allow for achievement of high-level resilience of public administration and public itself to external and internal interference risks. The Concept will be implemented according a semi-decentralised governance and coordination model, while ensuring comprehensive involvement of national and local government authorities. At the strategic level, the State Chancellery will ensure the planning and inter-institutional coordination of medium- and long-term measures on a daily basis, as well as in case of crisis and threats. At the tactical and operational level, the public administration institutions will, according to their competence, design and implement their strategic communication plans and strategies on a decentralized basis, as well as contribute to the strengthening of information space security (Cabinet of Ministers 2023).

The State Chancellery will monitor and coordinate the implementation of the Concept in cooperation with more than 20 public administration institutions, independent institutions, security services, as well as organised civil society, private and academic sectors. In order to implement the Concept, a plan

(restricted access information) of intended measures has been designed with specifically defined activities and results to be achieved, the division of responsibilities between institutions, as well as deadlines for the implementation.

Conclusions

Research and understanding of the concept of strategic communication and the application of strategic communication is still under development. New studies and publications analyse various aspects of strategic communication from an interdisciplinary perspective. The first formulation, stating that strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission, has been reformulated, as follows: strategic communication is the practice of deliberative and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach the set goals. The roles of both engagement and communication agent have been added to the definition. Finally, an even broader explanation of the functions and role of strategic communication has been reformulated – strategic communication is the management of amalgam of communication processes in the context of making, presenting, realizing, and remaking of strategy as a continuous, reflective learning loop. Hence, strategic communication is the overall management of communication process, including the full cycle of strategy formation, coordination, implementation and evaluation. It is possible that future studies will look more broadly at the impact of the COVID pandemic, as well as the impact of digitization processes on strategic communication. In fact, the latest OECD report on public communication already has included that in the study. In Latvia, the process of institutionalization of strategic communication is taking shape, as well as the understanding the role of strategic communication in public administration. Two studies are in progress at the University of Latvia on strategic communication, which will certainly provide an expanded understanding of strategic communication in Latvian public administration.

REFERENCES

- Aizsardzības ministrija (2019). *Informatīvais ziņojums "Par visaptverošās valsts aizsardzības sistēmas ieviešanu Latvijā"* [Informative report "On the Implementation of the Comprehensive State Defense System in Latvia"]. Considered by the Cabinet of Ministers on 8 January 2019. Retrieved from: <https://tap.mk.gov.lv/mk/tap/?pid=40462120>
- Bolt, N., Stolze, M., Haiden, L., Althuis, J. (2023). *Understanding Strategic Communications: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence Terminology Working Group Publication No. 3*. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. Retrieved from: <https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfs/?file=/publications/download/Terminology-Report-No3-DIGITAL.pdf?zoom=page-fit>

- Cabinet of Ministers (2023). *The National Concept on Strategic Communication and Security of the Information Space 2023–2027*. Approved on 24 January 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/media/15446/download?attachment>
- Falkheimer, J., Heide, M. (2023). *Strategic Communication. An Introduction to Theory and Global Practice*. 2nd ed. Routledge
- Falkheimer, J., Heide, M. (eds). (2022). *Research Handbook on Strategic Communication*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., Dozier, D. M. (2006). The Excellence Theory. In: Botan, C. H., Hazelton, V. (eds). *Public Relations Theory II*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 21–62.
- Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, V., Ruler, R. van, Verčič, D., Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining Strategic Communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1), 3–35, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15531180701285244>
- Holtzhausen, D., Fullerton, J., Lewis, B. K., Shipka, D. (2021). *Principles of Strategic Communication*. Routledge, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003002048>
- Holtzhausen, D., Zerfass, A. (2013). Strategic Communication – Pillars and Perspectives of an Alternative Paradigm. In: Zerfaß, A., Rademacher, L., Wehmeier, S. (eds). *Organisationskommunikation und Public Relations*. Springer VS, pp. 73–94, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18961-1_4
- Johansson, C., Grandien, C., Strandh, K. (2019). Roadmap for a Communication Maturity Index for Organizations – Theorizing, Analyzing and Developing Communication Value. *Public Relations Review*, 45(4), 101791, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.05.012>
- Ruler, B. van. (2018) Communication Theory: An Underrated Pillar on Which Strategic Communication Rests. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4), 367–381, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1452240>
- OECD (2023). *Public Communication Scan of the United Kingdom: Using Public Communication to Strengthen Democracy and Public Trust, OECD Public Governance Reviews*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc4a57b3-en>
- Saeima (2019). *National Security Concept*. Approved on September 26, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/309647>
- Saeima (2020). *Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija. Apstiprināta 2020. gada 24. septembrī* [Concept of National Defense. Approved on 24 September 2020]. Retrieved from: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/317591-par-valsts-aizsardzibas-koncepcijas-apstiprinasanu>
- Zerfass, A., Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., Moreno, A., Verčič, D. (2011). *European Communication Monitor 2011. Empirical Insights into Strategic Communication in Europe. Results of an Empirical Survey in 43 Countries (Chart Version)*. EACD; EUPRERA. Retrieved from: <https://www.communicationmonitor.eu/2011/06/14/ecm-european-communication-monitor-2011-reporting-decision-making-pr-credibility-roi-social-media-governance-qualifications/>
- Zerfass, A., Buhmann, A., Tench, R., Verčič, D., Moreno, A. (2021). *European Communication Monitor 2021. CommTech and Digital Infrastructure, Video-Conferencing, and Future Roles for Communication Professionals. Results of a Survey in 46 Countries*. EUPRERA/EACD. Retrieved from: <https://www.communicationmonitor.eu/2021/05/21/ecm-european-communication-monitor-2021/>

Zerfass, A., Sherzada, M. (2015). Corporate Communications from the CEO's Perspective: How Top Executives Conceptualize and Value Strategic Communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 20(3), 291–309, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCLJ-04-2014-0020>

Zerfass, A., Verčič, D., Nothhaft, H., Werder, K. P. (2018). Strategic Communication: Defining the Field and Its Contribution to Research and Practice. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4), 487–505, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1493485>

Communication of Female and Male Deputy Candidates on the Social Network *Facebook* During the Pre-Election Period of 14th *Saeima*

Guntis Meisters

University of Latvia

E-mail: guntis.meisters@gmail.com

Abstract. The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 aims to increase women's participation in politics. Although women's participation in politics has grown in recent years, the numbers are still insufficient due to various barriers such as gender stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and violence. The objectives of the study are to establish whether and how gender stereotypes are manifested in the communication of male and female candidates for the 14th *Saeima* (the parliament of Latvia) on *Facebook* one month before the elections, what persuasive communication techniques have been used by the candidates to attract votes on the aforementioned social network, whether and how gender stereotypes are manifested in the communication of voters with male and female candidates for the *Saeima*. Furthermore, the differences in language use between male and female candidates for the 14th *Saeima* (sociolinguistic gender model) are investigated. The theoretical part of the study describes the differences between the concepts of sex and gender, gender roles, gender stereotypes, as well as gender in political communication. The study considers social media and political communication, persuasive communication and the sociolinguistic gender model. The results of the study indicate the presence of gender stereotypes in politicians' communication with voters, as well as voters' communication with politicians. This is more evident in the communication of men.

Keywords: parliament, politicians, comments, voters, gender stereotypes, persuasion, female candidates, parliamentary candidates

Introduction

The European Committee of the Regions estimates that there are around one million local and regional elected representatives in European countries, but only around 30% of these are women (European Committee of the Regions 2023). The barriers to women's participation in politics are manifold, and one of the most fundamental is gender stereotyping. The European Parliament notes

that gender stereotypes can have an impact on women's participation in politics from a very early age, in pre-schools and in schools, when children are told about professions. These stereotypes can manifest themselves in messages that women are not cut out for politics or are not strong enough as political actors compared to men (European Parliament 2023).

In Europe, the studies conducted in 2018 found alarming levels of sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians in Europe. Those under 40 are more likely to be subjected to psychological pressure and various prejudices (European Parliament 2023). This was also confirmed by the Latvian Minister for Justice Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, who ran in the 14th *Saeima* elections on the list of the political party "*Jaunā Vienotība*". Lībiņa-Egnere has served as an elected member of the Latvian Parliament for several terms. In a semi-structured interview conducted as part of this research, she revealed that several years ago she experienced prejudiced attitudes from her colleagues in Parliament precisely because of her youth. However, she has had a successful political career and is ready to encourage other women to enter politics, leading by example.

Information on the Latvia Central Election Commission's website shows that over the last 12 years, Latvia has seen an increase in the desire of both women and men to be involved in politics, but there are still fewer women on party candidate lists and in the *Saeima*. A careful observation reveals important nuances that point to possible changes in the Latvian parliament, reducing the male dominance. The 14th *Saeima* is the first in which the number of women and men elected to a party's faction is approaching balance. From "*Stabilitātei!*" – 6 men and 5 women, and from "*Progresīvie*" – 4 women and 6 men. It should also be noted that the electoral lists for "*Stabilitātei!*" were 52% male and 48% female, while for "*Progresīvie*" – 40% female and 60% male (Latvia Central Electoral Commission 2022). These are the only cases where the percentages of women and men are so close to balance.

Recent research shows that "Latvia has the strongest stereotypes of gender roles in the Baltics" (Lejiņa 2022). In the "Novatore Baltic Gender Barometer 2022", more than half of respondents in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia express the belief that most professions are equally suitable for both genders, but there are still unjustified prejudices against female managers in some parts of society, such as "women are less resilient to stress or that they cannot be strong leaders" (TV3.lv 2022).

In order to achieve the European Union's goal of eradicating gender stereotypes, it is important to understand how pervasive is their presence at various political levels in Latvia, starting with pre-election communication, for example, in social networks. To find out if and how gender stereotypes arose in the communication of male and female deputy candidates on *Facebook*, whether and how these stereotypes were manifested in followers' comments with the candidates,

and what were the language differences in the communication of female and male deputy candidates on *Facebook* a month before the 14th *Saeima* elections in 2022, the master's thesis has the following objectives: to study gender the presence of stereotypes in the communication of male and female MP candidates on *Facebook*, whether these stereotypes are also visible in persuasive communication between male and female politicians, what are the verbal and non-verbal language differences between male and female candidates, whether and how gender stereotypes were manifested in the communication between voters and politicians on *Facebook*. Research period: September 2022.

In order to achieve the goals, the following tasks have been set:

- To establish the theoretical basis for the study;
- To establish the research design;
- To conduct a content analysis of the *Facebook* accounts of the 7 male and 7 female members of the 14th *Saeima* who received the most pluses from their political party (01.09.2022–30.09.2022). If a candidate did not have an active *Facebook* account, the next most plus-ranked MP was included in the study;
- To conduct a discourse analysis of the feedback or comments;
- To conduct semi-structured interviews with male and female MPs;
- To formulate conclusions.
- Research questions: How did gender stereotypes and differences in language use manifest themselves in the communication of male/female politicians on *Facebook*? How did gender stereotypes manifest themselves in the comments of the politician's followers on *Facebook*? What content was posted on *Facebook* by male and female research participants in the month before 14th *Saeima* elections?

The theoretical basis of the study consists of a description of gender, gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender in political communication. It also includes a theoretical overview of social media and political communication, persuasive communication and the sociolinguistic model of gender.

The relevance of the study is linked to the European Commission's commitment to tackle the negative impact of gender stereotypes on women's willingness to engage in politics, as "women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, should be free to express their ideas and emotions and to choose their education and careers without the constraints of stereotypical gender norms" (European Commission 2020). The results of the study on gender stereotypes and differences in language use between men and women in the 14th *Saeima*'s pre-election communication on *Facebook* will provide insights into the current situation in Latvia in these areas. Additionally, the results will help to put forward proposals for further action including new research, to tackle various prejudices and entrenched beliefs about gender roles.

Methodology

US political scientist Kathleen Dolan argues that the so-called masculine traits such as self-confidence and aggressiveness make men better qualified to tackle tough issues such as the economy, foreign affairs, defence or the military. In contrast, feminine traits such as compassion, warmth and sensitivity are associated with women's competence in health, education, combating poverty and protecting the environment (Dolan 2005). Decades of research on gender situation in politics have shown that gender stereotypes play an important role in how political actors communicate with voters, how voters perceive female and male politicians' communication, and what the public expects from female and male politicians (Winfrey *et al.* 2019). Stereotypes of women as politicians can adversely affect their chances of being elected to parliament or appointed to positions of political responsibility. Stereotypes characterise women as sensitive, emotional and weak, and these are qualities that "voters do not traditionally associate with political leadership. Voters are more likely to associate their political representation with masculine traits such as toughness, aggressiveness self-confidence" (Bauer 2019).

Four methods were used to investigate the presence of gender stereotypes in the communication, persuasive communication and language use of female and male deputy candidates and their followers:

- 1) qualitative content analysis;
- 2) discourse analysis;
- 3) semi-structured interview;
- 4) chi-square criterion.

Qualitative content analysis was used to examine the context of the *Facebook* posts posted by the study participants, male and female parliamentary candidates in September 2022, to identify possible hidden meanings based on gender stereotypes and differences in language use. The discourse analysis provided an opportunity to explore social media comments, their substance, the content that is not explicitly stated in the text. The semi-structured interview allowed to interpret the data, while chi-square calculations helped to identify statistically significant differences in the results.

For the purposes of this study, qualitative content analysis codebooks, including categories and subcategories, were created with the aim of understanding the gender stereotypes of the subjects *Facebook* posts and the differences in language use between men and women. One of the tasks to be completed by sociolinguistic analysis was to investigate the differences between male and female parliamentary candidates in the use of different coloured punctuation offered by *Facebook*. Some of the categories and subcategories included in the qualitative content analysis are adapted from a similar study in Greece,

which also explained the impact of gender stereotypes on the communication of parliamentary candidates ahead of the 2019 elections (Tsichla *et al.* 2021). Two main variables have been identified for the analysis: women are coded M1, men – M2. The data analysis will also explain whether there are statistically significant differences between the selected variables in the female and male groups using the chi-square criterion. A difference will be considered statistically significant if the p-value is less than 0.005. The calculations were carried out in the open access web tool <https://www.socscistatistics.com/>. The members of the 14th *Saeima* were interviewed for the purposes of the current study, using the semi-structured interview method. Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach was used to analyse the followers' comments on male and female deputy candidates *Facebook* posts. Categories and subcategories were drawn up for the discourse analysis of the comments, some of them – based on similar studies (Tsichla *et al.* 2019; Diekman 2000). The aim of this analysis: to search the comment discourses for overt or covert signs of gender stereotypes in the attitudes of commentators towards a particular deputy candidate or politicians in general.

Results

During the study period, male and female candidates for the 14th *Saeima* made a total of 603 *Facebook* posts (printed text, photos, videos, etc.). 310 (51%) posts for men and 293 (49%) for women. After analysing the data, it emerged that during the period under study, men posted more *Facebook* posts in printed text than female deputy candidates – 244 posts for men and 205 posts for women.

Meanwhile, women shared more content posted by others than men. Men were more likely than women to mention other persons or institutions in their posts and to post hashtags. The differences observed are statistically significant. Comparing the topics of the posts, men and women posted almost equally on *Facebook* about election campaign activities, but men were slightly more active (153 times men, 132 times women) and communicated statistically significantly more than women about the issues of foreign affairs.

Women, on the other hand, focused more on heating and electricity prices, as well as economic development issues – a statistically significant difference. Women were slightly more likely than men to report on education issues, although there was no statistically significant difference. Men communicated statistically significantly more than women on migration issues (see Figure 1).

During the study period from 1 September 2022 to 30 September 2022, 7 367 comments were added on *Facebook* to the posts of the study participants. An analysis of the textual form of the comments reveals that, overall, the authors have expressed themselves most often in terms of recounting, suggesting and

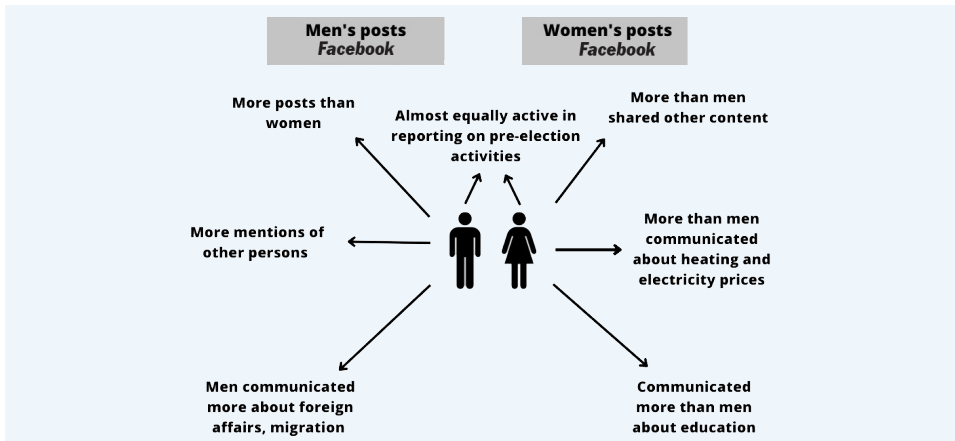


Figure 1. Facebook posts of male and female parliamentary candidates based on gender stereotyped in September 2022

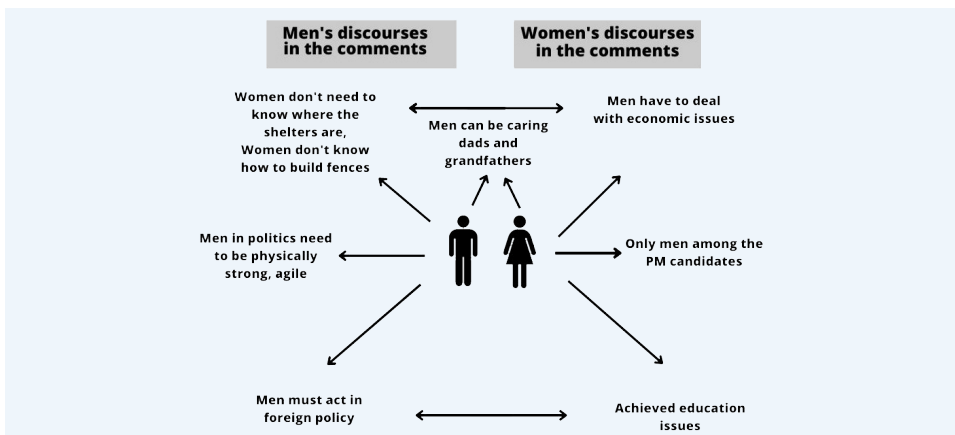


Figure 2. Gender stereotyped discourses between male and female commentators in September 2022

wishing, and least often – in terms of commanding. The content or discursive type of the comments is mostly expressed in a challenging and justifying style. Apologies were the least frequent type of comment (see Figure 2).

Although there are many similarities, there are also differences in the language use (sociolinguistic gender pattern) between male and female candidates in Facebook posts. The most significant differences are the following: women were more likely to express support, men were more likely to post more aggressive messages, expressing strong opinions or opposing. Both men and women were equally likely to use bright red punctuation in their texts to reinforce the meaning of the text. Women were more likely to use metaphors in their texts (see Figure 3).

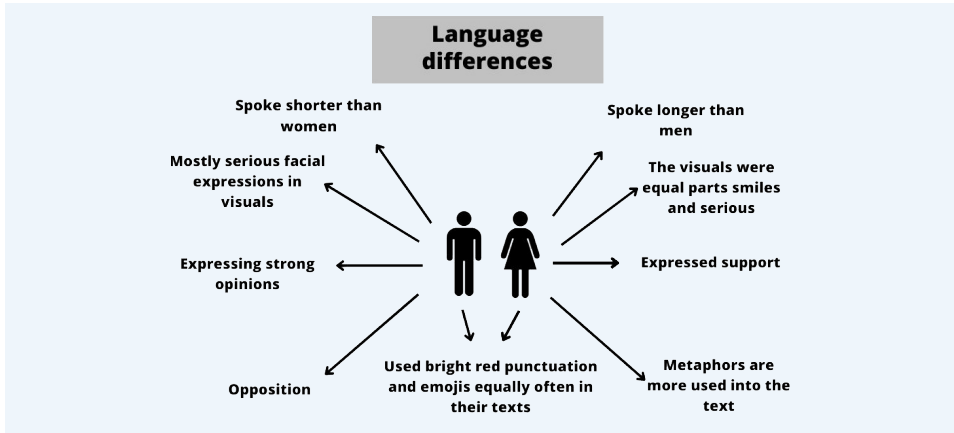


Figure 3. Differences in language use between male and female parliamentary candidates on Facebook in September 2022

Conclusions

Male and female parliamentary candidates and their followers on Facebook used gender-stereotyped communication – men more often than women. This shows that gender stereotypes are a problem for Latvian society as a whole. Gender equality issues are not only not a priority in Latvian politics, but a topic that politicians avoid. The problem has been left to its own devices, or time will put everything in its place. It is an uncomfortable topic, because if a discussion were to be started on this issue, it could have wide repercussions in society. Communication of persuasion is about breaking gender stereotypes, because women communicate about the economy, while men demonstrate that they are good fathers, grandfathers – not just money earners. Women’s participation and involvement in politics should be encouraged. Minister for Justice Inese Libiņa-Egnere, who has been a member of the *Saeima* in several previous parliamentary terms, admitted that during her time in the *Saeima* she has faced prejudices and stereotypical views from men concerning her youth and lack of experience. In a semi-structured interview conducted as part of this research, Libiņa-Egnere stated:

I have been in politics for 12 years now, so I know my colleagues and my colleagues know me, so maybe these stereotypes of not knowing people are no longer relevant. You have to ask new colleagues how they feel, but yes, I remember that in some ways you have to work hard to be taken seriously when you are still relatively young and a woman.

The current study expands knowledge about the under-researched presence of gender stereotypes in Latvian politics, providing evidence that gender stereotypes

and various gender biases are present in Latvian politics and society at large. Further research is needed to expand the relevant knowledge and to develop recommendations for reducing and eradicating gender stereotypes. For example, greater involvement of politicians in research would be welcome. It would also be beneficial to employ the method of observation. The possibility of one or more of the politicians becoming a researcher and observer could be considered. During the research, out of 8 politicians approached on several occasions, only the Minister for Justice, Lībiņa-Egnere, responded. This shows that politicians, both men and women, do not sufficiently appreciate the danger that gender stereotypes represent for development of the country.

Author's note: This article is based on the master's thesis developed and defended in the master's study programme "Communication Science" at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia. The scientific supervisor of the master's thesis is Associate Professor Marita Zitmane.

REFERENCES

- Bauer, M. N. (2019). Gender Stereotyping in Political Decision Making. In: *Oxford Research Encyclopaedias*. Retrieved from: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-772>
- Dolan, K. (2005). Do Women Candidates Play to Gender Stereotypes? Do Men Candidates Play to Women? Candidate Sex and Issues Priorities on Campaign Websites. *Political Research Quarterly*, 58(1), 31–44, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290505800103>
- European Commission (2020). *A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025*. Retrieved from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>
- European Committee of the Regions. (2023). *For more Women in Politics*. Retrieved from: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/pages/gender-balance.aspx>
- European Parliament. (2023). *Women in Politics in the EU*. Retrieved from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/739383/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)739383_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/739383/EPRS_BRI(2023)739383_EN.pdf)
- Centrālā vēlēšanu komisija. (2022). *14. Saeimas vēlēšanu rezultāti* [The 14th Saeima Election Results]. Retrieved from: <https://sv2022.cvk.lv/pub/velesanu-rezultati>
- Diekman, A. B., Eagly, A. H. (2000). Stereotypes as Dynamic Constructs: Women and Men of the Past, Present, and Future. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(10), 1171–1188. Retrieved from: <http://www.ugr.es/~amonteol/psicologia%20social/DOCUMENTOS/stereotypeswomenandmeneagly2000.pdf>
- Lejiņa, D. (2022). *Baltijas dzimumu līdztiesības barometrs 2022. PowerPoint prezentācija* [Baltic Gender Equality Barometer 2022. PowerPoint presentation]. Retrieved from: https://arodbiedribas.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Novatore_200123_prezentacija.pdf
- Tsichla, E., Lappas, G., Triantafyllidou, A., Klefodimos, A. (2023). Gender Differences in Politicians' Facebook Campaigns: Campaign Practices, Campaign Issues and Voter Engagement. *New Media & Society*, 25(11), 2918–2938, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211036405>

TV3.lv (2022). *Pētījums: Latvijā ir Baltijā spēcīgākie stereotipi par dzimumu lomām* [Research: Latvia has the Strongest Stereotypes about Gender Roles in the Baltics]. Retrieved from: <https://zinas.tv3.lv/latvija/petijums-latvija-ir-baltija-specigakie-stereotipi-par-dzimumu-lomam/>

Winfrey, K. L., Schnoebelen, J. M. (2019). Running as a Woman (or Man): A Review of Research on Political Communicators and Gender Stereotypes. *Review of Communication Research*, 7, 109–138, DOI: [10.12840/ISSN.2255-4165.020](https://doi.org/10.12840/ISSN.2255-4165.020)

Analysis of Latvian Celebrity Communication and Charity Concerts during the Fatigue Phase of the War in Ukraine (February–April 2023)

Aloiza Meldere

University of Latvia

E-mail: aloizameldere99@gmail.com

Abstract. The aim of the current paper is to explore how concerts function as tools for communication and mobilization during the phase of war fatigue, and how the involved celebrities promote public engagement to facilitate fundraising and collection of donations. The theoretical framework is based on the concepts of social proof, ritual theory, and the term “war fatigue”. The empirical part consists of qualitative content analysis, examining the content of celebrities’ accounts in social media platforms such as *Instagram* and *Twitter*. Additionally, a survey was conducted, along with a partially structured interview with Ralfs Eilands, and an open observation was also carried out. The research concludes that concerts are effective mobilization tools during the phase of war fatigue. People’s interaction with war-related news decreases during the period of war fatigue, and celebrities tend to make posts primarily during event times, followed by a rapid decrease in communication afterwards.

Keywords: *Twitter*, *Instagram*, war fatigue, war in Ukraine

Introduction

For over a year now, the ongoing war in Ukraine has been causing concerns throughout Europe. The devastation wreaked by the war has led to the exacerbation of crises and emotional distress among people. Currently, there is a sense of war fatigue that manifests itself as decrease in the interest concerning the war in society due to the intensity and news overload, as well as the events around it.

Given the proximity of the war to Latvia, the country has been actively involved in providing support and expressing genuine concern. This study falls within the broader field of communication research, specifically referred to as “crisis communication”. An important aspect to consider is that war fatigue has set in, and people are becoming accustomed to the ongoing wartime situation. The problem also concerns society’s engagement with war-related topics

and its perception of the news. War fatigue leads to avoidance of war-related news. Even when celebrities communicate about it the perception of the war has changed. Considering the contemporary era of information overload, it can easily contribute to information fatigue that exacerbates people's avoidance of information with negative connotations in this difficult period of wartime fatigue.

Since the late 19th century, the news media have had a crucial role in conflicts, with significant technological advancements marking consequential shifts in the dynamics amongst the news organisations, the populations of warring nations, and the military (Parker 2020). Media have served as an important source of information and, moreover, a tool and even a weapon used by warring parties in various wartime periods to influence the population and create propaganda (Arnold *et al.* 2019).

Despite the fact that numerous media outlets have operated for many years, conflict is now communicated in ways that have never been seen before. Soldiers act as reporters, opinions are heard from both parties of the conflict, and journalists have become both reporters and camera operators due to their participation in social media. With the help of social media, the public can see soldiers' lives in posts and real footage from conflict zones, the so-called hotspots. The war in Ukraine and Russia is described with a new, previously unprecedented term in the field of communication called the "First social media war", since for the first time anyone on the ground can act as a *de facto* war reporter, sharing their experiences from the front lines. Likewise, social media are transforming the contemporary combat experience of the military staff, their families, and even of the world (Suciu 2022).

The media, along with individuals and celebrities on their own accounts on social media platforms, engage in the distribution of their thoughts on specific subjects in a broader way. According to media researcher Nick Newman, contemporary news organisations face competition not only from other traditional news organisations but also from non-traditional news organisations like social media platforms and messaging apps. These non-traditional sources have gained momentum as primary information sources for a growing segment of the population. The excessive availability of information can result in information overload and a tendency to disengage from it, hence increasing the prevalence of issues such as the propagation of inaccurate and misleading news (Newman 2019). The presence of war fatigue can be detected through individual's hesitation to engage with the news that bear relation to the war, exacerbated by information overload.

Multiple studies have identified a range of factors that contribute to individuals' tendency to abstain from engaging with news consumption. The reasons for this vary from readers' reluctance to engage with negative information to their preference for news that directly relate to their everyday preoccupations. However, one hypothesis that consistently emerges is that there is too much

information (Tandoc *et al.* 2022). Taking into account this problem, – that the war has dragged on and people increasingly avoid the negative and unpleasant news, solutions must be found to gather the people for unity and repeated support. One of the effective methods is concert.

For several years, concerts have served as a means of communication to draw people's attention to significant events. It is an instrument that has been extensively tested and refined. The use of a musical performance has the capacity to promote unity among individuals and inspire the community to come together with one goal in mind. Concerts have helped to bring to public attention important issues and illnesses that were previously considered taboo topics. A good example is the concert that took place at Wembley Stadium in 1992. Musician Freddie Mercury, shortly before his death, revealed that he was HIV positive and gave a legendary concert that helped raise awareness about AIDS and also generated substantial contributions. The concert raised funds for AIDS research and reached approximately 1 billion people, increasing awareness about AIDS among a healthy music-loving audience (Tan 2018). This example shows how effective a concert can be.

The key concept behind the reason why concerts and charity events are effective is explained through the theory of ritual. Ritual is the foundation of all social activities and can take many different forms. Rituals can be big and expansive, like the Olympic Games, or small and intimate, like graduation ceremonies, or even as simple as “liking” a post on *Facebook* or another social media platform to assess the content of a friend's social network account. Rituals have a physical influence and reinforce community attitudes, whether they be nationalistic in nature, rites of passage, or simply an acknowledgment that one's contribution to a social network matters (Rossner *et al.* 2014).

Another persuasive way to draw public attention and engage people with important topics is through celebrity endorsement. It has been proven that the campaigns that involve famous people are more successful in generating support. A famous person, also known as a celebrity, is defined as an individual who has gained wide recognition and public attention due to their notable achievements, talent or reputation. These individuals often influence popular culture, media, and society (Abd-Elhamid *et al.* 2019).

There are several key concepts to take into account for successful celebrity endorsement. Building trust is essential for celebrity involvement to be justified. People will not perceive a celebrity's inner motivation, if they suspect that the celebrity is only endorsing something for financial gain or with a sole view of enhancing their reputation (external motivation) rather than being motivated by a genuine belief in the social cause (internal motivation). However, if it is clearly communicated that the celebrity is not receiving financial remuneration, people are more likely to believe that the celebrity is endorsing the respective cause because their intentions are genuine toward the organization's goals (Moore *et al.* 1994).

Robert Cialdini's theory of "social proof" explains why people choose to follow the example of a celebrity. His theory suggests that people come to accept something as right or appropriate by ascertaining what other people think is right. It works especially effectively when it comes to behaviour in an uncertain situation – people accept the behaviour they observe in others as correct (Cialdini 2009).

Social learning happens best when a person interacts either with someone they like, or a like-minded individual. Then this person "addresses" him. The factor of liking is essential. Therefore, people usually accept as "correct" a behaviour suggestion or attitude that comes from the individuals who are in some way similar to themselves, or maybe have similar views, or if people see this individual as an authority (Abrams *et al.* 1990). Therefore, the celebrities, in contemporary society they can also be influencers, constitute a good tool that can contribute to changing society's thinking, or influencing their actions, and even encourage good deeds such as donation.

Methodology

This study aims to provide clear answers to the following research questions:

1. How does a concert function as a communicative tool for mobilizing society to raise donations in a wartime crisis situation, particularly during the phase of war fatigue?
2. What is the significance and impact of recognizable individuals in crisis communication and donation collection? Can they motivate society to engage in charity work?
3. Can a concert promote renewed engagement of the public with the Ukraine war crisis situation and the issues surrounding it?
4. Do celebrity efforts in communicating the seriousness of the war through post-fundraising concerts suffer from diminishing intensity, and is the impact of this communication temporary?

To reach the goal, the study has been structured on the basis of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to obtain a wider view of the problem.

The author aimed at considering the effectiveness of fundraising events from several aspects, – from the perspective of celebrities and their interaction on social media, that were studied through content analysis, the open observation provided an insight into planning of the specific concerts, and analyses the course of the event and the public's involvement in them, as well as the opinion of the creator of the events Ralfs Eilands, which was obtained through a semi-structured interview, while in order to acquire people's personal opinion about the organized events for collecting donations in support of Ukraine, quantitative data was collected by means of a questionnaire-based survey.

The traditional coding system of content analysis was applied in this study. Since the aim of the work was to explore the communication of celebrities in war fatigue period and how they influence people, who were the organizers and participants of the events “*Izsmej kara kuģi Ukrainas brīvībai*” (“Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine”) and “*Veltījums Ukrainai*” (“Dedication to Ukraine”), the author analysed their *Twitter* and *Instagram* communication. 85 of celebrity and music group profiles were examined. The individual members of bands were not selected as separate entities, but the social media accounts of specific bands were analysed, as some performed individually, simultaneously being band members. Content analysis was conducted over a 3-month period, from January to March. From the 85 profiles of celebrities who participated in both events, the individuals who shared content related to the Ukraine war topic were selected for analysis. If the content on the celebrities’ social media did not cover this topic, it was not included in the analysis. In total, the data was obtained concerning 32 celebrities.

Since this is a large dataset requiring a systematic analysis method, the data were processed using the SPSS data analysis software. In the qualitative content analysis, a coding system was created to ensure precise and accurate data processing. The codes were assigned in a coding system for research parameters such as the type, the topic of the post, and the content of the post. The study examined public reactions, including the number of likes, shares and comments. In addition, a comment section was created to take into account important notes or keywords, including topic-related hashtags in celebrity posts, and to track whose posts were being reposted or reshared.

The researcher’s goal was to conduct observations at the two aforementioned fundraising events for Ukraine (“Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine” and “Dedication to Ukraine”), The author of the study chose the open observation method – it did not involve prior information, specific topics, or observation guidelines, so the researcher attended the events open minded. During the observation, data were recorded using the recording method, as well as taking the photos.

The third method that was used in research is the semi-structured interview, it was used to find out the opinion of the main initiator and organizer of the two events – “Dedication to Ukraine” and “Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine” – Ralfs Eilands on specific topics and key aspects.

In the design of the research, a survey method was chosen to demonstrate the effectiveness of the fundraising events in terms of how they work to draw public attention to an important event in a crisis situation. The survey was disseminated among acquaintances and further spread through a chain reaction. The author chose to publish the survey on the *Facebook* timeline and shared it in various discussion groups. The survey was shared in two Ukrainian aid and

support groups. The survey was also sent to businesses, schools, dance groups, and interviews were conducted with older individuals who did not use smart devices. In total, 122 respondents from the age groups of 13 to 60 were reached.

Results

1. The concept of war fatigue and its manifestations

The main subject of the current study is war fatigue, and the survey results confirmed that nearly the majority of respondents at the time of the survey were experiencing some form of fatigue engendered by the war situation. Approximately 40% stated that they were feeling war fatigue. Both events (“Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine” and “Dedication to Ukraine”) were conceived by Ralfs Eilands, the author of the ideas and the initiator of the events. Despite the emotional strain and fatigue, the event organizer continued to host both events. The respondent acknowledged being tired of the entire situation. Eilands mentioned that in life, one does not always do things that one enjoys or wants to do; sometimes, one knows it is the right thing to do, and one simply has to act on it (Eilands 2023).

Through open observation, it was possible to notice the fundamental principles of the fundraising theories, as well as their operation and efficiency in real life. Nevertheless, in his dual role as both the event organizer and a participant, Ralfs witnessed the presence of societal tiredness. However, this factor did not hinder the general public from actively attending, observing, and demonstrating their support at these events.

2. Concert as a fundraising tool

The survey confirmed that about half of the individuals within the randomly sampled groups had participated in one of the events. This indicated that individuals had a high level of responsiveness and knowledge regarding both occasions, as seen by their active engagement. After observing the data on the attendance of the events, it was found that the concert “Dedication to Ukraine” was attended by more people than “Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine”.

During the course of this study, the author observed the practical implementations of theories in real-world contexts. Both measurements, upon careful examination, can be considered effective in capturing the essential characteristics of ritual theory. The support provided by Ukraine to Latvians has assumed a ritualistic nature. According to theoretical frameworks, rituals are characterized by repetitive and practiced behaviours. These activities have been taking place for a second year in a row, and the fundraising has been remarkably successful, delivering significant achievements in terms of contributions. The event “Mock

Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine” included symbols, which included various exclamations and phrases often heard and seen used on social networks referring to the war in Ukraine. By using symbolism and evoking emotions, it becomes possible to assess the collective solidarity and limitless empathy of individuals.



Figures 1–4. Charity concert and support event “Dedication to Ukraine”, 24 February 2023



Figures 5–8. Charity concert “Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine”, 1 April 2023



Figures 9–10. Charity concert “Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine”, 1 April 2023

The elements of Robert Cialdini’s social proof theory were identified while observing the events. This was clearly manifested at the events when the celebrities invited public to donate and indicated that they had made their own contributions and would continue to do so. Social proof means that individuals choose to follow the people they like. The wide range of celebrities made it possible for each of the viewers to find a favourite person or celebrity that they really liked. This could also be a motivation for some viewers to come, support and donate to the cause.

3. Content analysis of celebrity accounts on social media platforms during war fatigue phase

The author obtained data from respondents confirming that 12% of the respondents were most interested in the war at the moment and read about it every day in the age group of 41–50 years. Through qualitative content analysis, a larger dataset was researched and summarized with SPSS data software.

The author additionally established the content of the message embedded in posts through the use of codes. The message of the post on the day of the concert was most often informative, in 11 cases (11/24, 45.8%), there were also six posts that contained the author’s reflections about the event itself or its circumstances, four appeals, two acknowledgments and one joke element. Before the concert, most often there were informational posts, 51 posts (51/98, 52.0%), then 28 reflections of the author (28/98, 28.6%), 11 invitations (11/98, 11.2%)

Following the concert “Dedication to Ukraine”, an increased number of posts were seen, including expressions of gratitude directed towards both the participants for their performance and the donors associated with the event. During the event, there was a degree of communication, albeit to a reduced extent compared to the post-event period. Notably, the involvement of celebrities in actively spreading information related to the ongoing events, was very limited. Comparing the two events, there were more posts on the day of the concert “Dedication to Ukraine” (24 entries, 7.5% versus 9 entries, 2.8%) than on the day of the comedy event (9 entries, 2.8%). More celebrities chose the *Twitter* platform over *Instagram* to express their opinion.

Celebrities made the most posts in the month of February, or during the period when the concert “Dedication to Ukraine” was held. Most of the posts contained informational content about the concert. After the concert, the celebrities shared very few posts thanking the people for donations – that is an important aspect when conducting donation. Celebrity posts consisted of their thoughts or some reflections regarding the concert that took place. However, in April, when the event “Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine” took place, the content of the social networks of celebrities was informative rather than inviting, and mostly self-reflective.

4. People’s interactions with celebrity posts on Instagram and Twitter

The correlation between the time of observation and number of *likes* was not significant. The engagement was constant over time with no association between time and the number of *likes* in the posts, $p = 0.09$.

The highest amount of comments, as well as the influx of *likes* were observed at the during the “Dedication to Ukraine” concert. The activity peak on social media was identified shortly after the concert. Visually and statistically, both *Twitter* and *Instagram* photos received fewer *likes* with time, with *Instagram* showing a stronger negative correlation (-0.398 , $p = 0.003$) than *Twitter* (-0.098 , $p = 0.1$).

Conclusions

It was proven that the society is experiencing war fatigue and has lost interest in news related to the war in Ukraine. The study demonstrated that the concert served as an effective instrument for mobilising and developing social solidarity. By using the method of open observation, the visible characteristics of ritual theory were revealed, including the changes in individuals’ actions and the development of shared emotional states. The research revealed that celebrity endorsement successfully encourages public engagement and active participation in significant initiatives like fundraising. The events also demonstrated

the display of social proof theory. The results of the survey demonstrated that the presence of celebrities in concert activities held significance for individuals, although not being the primary motivation for attending such events. It was found that the concert was capable to reclaim the public attention to the events in Ukraine in the period when war fatigue had descended upon people. It can be concluded that celebrity communication about Ukraine displayed an upward trend only during the timeframe including the two concerts. After the charity events, the celebrity engagement in openly discussing and addressing the ongoing state of warfare within their accounts on social media platforms notably declined. Communication about war returned to its initial state – few posts or silence, and society once again distanced itself from the news.

Author's note. The current paper is based on the master's thesis developed and defended in the master's study programme "Communication Science" at the University of Latvia Faculty of Social Sciences. The research supervisor of the thesis is Professor Vita Zelče.

REFERENCES

- Abd-Elhamid, S., Mahrous, A. A. (2019). Theoretical Framework of the Relationship between Celebrity Endorsement and Charity Donations. *SSRN*, Sept. 19, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3456493>
- Abrams, D., Wetherell, M., Cochrane, S., Hogg, M. A., Turner, J. C. (1990). Knowing What to Think by Knowing Who You Are: Self-Categorization and the Nature of Norm Formation, Conformity and Group Polarization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 29(2), 97–119, DOI: [10.1111/j.2044-8309.1990.tb00892.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1990.tb00892.x)
- Arnold, K., Preston, P., Kinnebrock, S. (eds). (2019). *The Handbook of European Communication History*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cialdini, R. (2009). *Influence: Science and Practice*. 5th ed., Allyn and Bacon.
- Eilands, R. (2023). *Aloiza Medere's Interview with Ralfs Eilands*. February 5. Archive of the author of the article.
- Moore, D. J., Mowen, J. C., Reardon, R. (1994). Multiple Sources in Advertising Appeals: When Product Endorsers Are Paid by the Advertising Sponsor. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 22(3), 234–243, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0092070394223004>
- Newman, N. (2019). Executive Summary and Key Findings of the 2019 Report. In: Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Nielsen, R. K. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, pp. 9–32. Retrieved from: <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/overview-key-findings-2019/>
- Rossner, M., Meher, M. (2014). Emotions in Ritual Theories. In: Stets, J. E., Turner, J. H. (eds). *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*: Vol. II. Springer, pp. 199–220, DOI: [10.1007/978-94-017-9130-4_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9130-4_10)
- Parker, G. (ed.). (2020). *The Cambridge History of Warfare*. Cambridge University Press.

Suciu, P. (2022). Social Media is Impacting Military Performance and Changing the Nature of War. *Forbes*, June 7. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2022/06/07/social-media-is-impacting-military-performance-and-changing-the-nature-of-war/?sh=400e6762e394>

Tan, J. (2018). LGBTQ+ Representation and Activism in the Music Industry. *Backstage Pass*, 1(1), Article 13. Retrieved from: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/backstage-pass/vol1/iss1/13>

Tandoc, Jr., E. C., Kim, H. K. (2022). Avoiding Real News, Believing in Fake News? Investigating Pathways from Information Overload to Misbelief. *Journalism*, 24(6), 1174–1192, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/14648849221090744>

Representation of Socially Significant Issues in the Communication of Virtual Influencers on Social Medium *Instagram*

Silvija Rudzika

University of Latvia

E-mail: rudzikasilvija@gmail.com

Abstract: The aim of the current study is to analyse the representation of socially important issues in the publications of virtual influencers on the social medium *Instagram*, using qualitative content analysis, focus group discussion and expert interviews. The theoretical basis of the work consists of a review of the concepts of representation and social media, social media influencers and social agency, as well as six theoretical and thematic frames – simulation, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, melancholic media and virtual influencers, which act as perspectives through which to look and explain virtuality in communication. The rapid development of computer technology has contributed to the spread of virtual characters, more commonly known as virtual influencers, in social media, who are able to interact with social media users. The concept of virtual influencers is an interdisciplinary phenomenon that combines technological, social and communicative aspects and can be used as a meaningful and effective tool for the representation of socially important topics. Although communication with a virtual character can be classified as a simulation, according to social agency theory, people naturally perceive virtual characters as social actors with certain anthropomorphic characteristics. This perception forces people to behave socially towards virtual agents, applying social rules to them, such as politeness and ethical norms.

Keywords: virtual influencers, virtual reality, representation, socially significant issues, social media, *Instagram*

Introduction

Virtual agents are becoming common in many fields – virtual assistants, chatbots, holograms, including virtual influencers that have started to operate on social media platforms by integrating communication networks and interacting with users of these networks. Based on research on human-computer interaction, Uncanny Valley hypothesis and paradigm of computers as social agents, it

can be concluded that we currently live in the so-called era of “hyper-connectivity”, which reflects the convergence of technology with people’s daily lives and embeds computer-mediated agents in environments that were previously human-only domains (Arsenyan, Mirowska 2021).

These days, it seems that internet users no longer care if the partner of social interaction is a living person or an authentic human simulation, as long as its appearance is quite likeable and attractive. A modern and trendy appearance, chosen for communication processes on social media, is a very important aspect among digital users. It is considered one of the main features of the identity presented in social networks, and it is not essential whether these identities are actual or only virtual (Scorzin 2021).

Advances in computer technology have given rise to virtual characters, more commonly known as virtual proliferation of influencers, which can be defined as digital entities with an anthropomorphic appearance that are controlled by human or software and are able to interact with social media users. Companies are investing resources to develop virtual agents to engage in customer service. The use of virtual agents in the travel and hospitality industry is predicted to increase by 241%, while in the goods consumption sector by 187%. In the banking sector, 87% of companies already use digitally generated agents or plan to introduce them within two years (Miao *et al.* 2022).

Virtual influencer is a character who can be found online and in different social networks, without the attachment and physical presence in the real offline world. They range in appearance from an uncanny humanoid to a completely fantastic creature. These characters are created using computer technologies of varying degrees of complexity, which enable attaining a high image quality and photorealism. Virtual influencers are most often created to attract wide audiences and promote products, brands or certain messages (Berryman *et al.* 2021). In the past couple of years, more and more new virtual influencers have appeared with a numerically quite impressive following regiment. It is a comparatively new phenomenon, so far quite seldom studied in the academic environment, so it is important to adapt and transform the existing communication theories or, in some cases, come up with new theories to study the use of innovative technological solutions in communication science.

Virtual influencers’ popularity grew during the pandemic, because they were not influenced by the restrictions which had to be introduced by the authorities and institutions, that were influencing people (Gross 2022). Although in the context of Latvia virtual influencers are a novel phenomenon, as a result of the pandemic, the first cases of using virtual influencers appeared in the media. The first such case in Latvia can be considered the cover of the May/June 2020 issue of “*Pastaiga*” magazine, where a cover model was created with the help of a 3D program to protect real models, makeup artists and other people involved in the creation of the photo shoot against the threat of contracting illness during the COVID-19 restrictions.

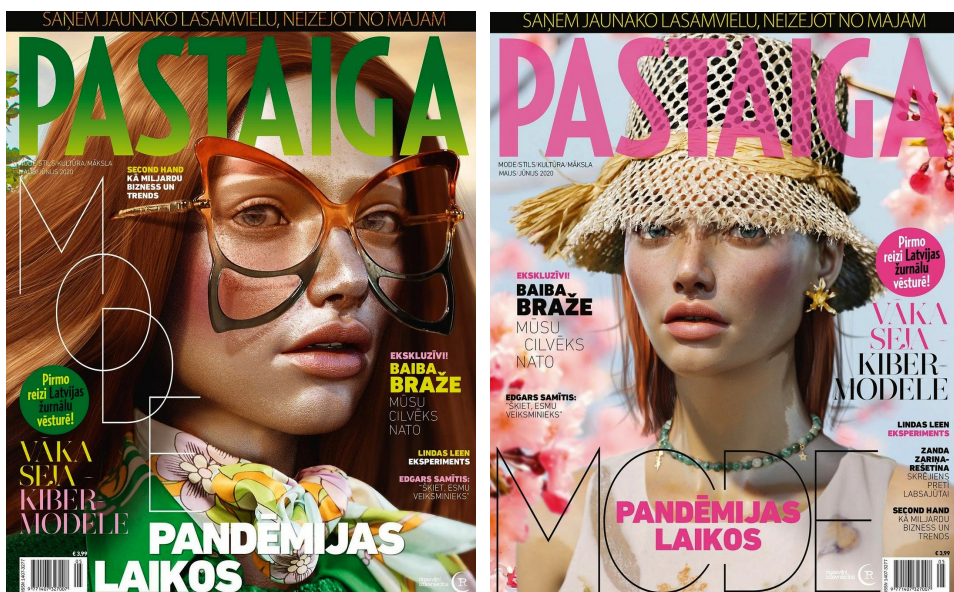


Figure 1. Cybermodel or virtual model on the covers of May/June 2020 issue of “Pastaiga” magazine

Theoretical framework

Representation means an action in which a fact is assigned a greater importance than another fact or other means of discourse that are adopted in the concept of individualistic psychology – representation is the act of presentation to the mind or imagination. Representation too clearly pertains to the circumstance that an image, a concept or an idea is presented in a particular way (Harre 1984, 928). Representation also denotes a shared system of values, ideas and practices that enable people to understand each other and communicate about specific issues and topics (Howarth 2011). Overall, a representation can be said to refer to an aspect of “reality” such as a person, place, object, the construction of events, cultural identity and other abstract concepts in any medium, especially in the mass media (Monti, Rozzonelli 2015, 93).

As information technology researcher and professor emeritus Ron Weber writes, “representation” is the essence of all information systems. The purpose of information systems is to track states and state changes in other systems. Observing the information system’s behaviour, we eliminate the need to observe the behaviour of the systems that this information represents. For example, in a simulation, the represented system may not exist in reality except for our minds. Simulation is an information system that enables gaining an insight into the behaviour of the represented system (Weber 2003).

There is currently a shift from “representation” to “simulation” as the dominant mode for the organization of cultural objects and assigning meanings to these cultural objects in relation to the contemporary world. The spread of television screens, computers and social networks, the saturation of everyday life with impressive images and other types of visual materials that are carefully mediated and processed, as a result of which any connection with the “real world” seems to be lost, and a simulated world is created in its place: a hyperreality where the artificial is experienced as real (Hegarty 2008).

Representation and relationship (no matter how mediated) between the real world and its referents in the images and narratives of popular media and art are gradually disappearing. For a French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, simulacra are signs that can no longer be exchanged for the “real” elements, but the exchange takes place only with other signs of the system. This loss of the “real” is attributable to the modern world as a whole, because reality has become hyperreality (Giddings 2007). Hence, it can be concluded that Baudrillard’s concept of simulation does not claim to be a false view of the world, but it constructs a “real” world which he identifies as hyperreal (Hegarty 2008).

In the community of human–robot interaction, several theories of social agency have been distinguished and defined, which address the field’s unique perspective. Many of these theories are based on social actor or agent theory, proposing that people naturally perceive computers with certain characteristics (e.g., linguistic output) as social actors despite the fact that computers have no feelings, egos or human motivations. This perception makes people behave socially towards machines, for example, by applying social rules to them, such as empathy and ethical norms. Basically, social agency theory states that the use of verbal communication and visual cues, such as a more human rather than an overtly artificial voice in computer-generated messages can lead people to believe that their interaction with the computer is similar to what they would expect a human–human conversation to be (Jackson, Williams 2021). Social agency theory also postulates that the life-like characteristics of animate agent behaviour promotes the learner’s social engagement, thereby allowing the learner to create a simulated human connection with the virtual agent (Atkinsona *et al.* 2005).

In the context of the study, it is worth to mention a theory about the “uncanny valley”, the author of which is robotics professor Masahiro Mori and his colleagues. The theory contends that a greater human sympathy and empathy is acquired by robots that do not look too much like human beings, but rather resemble mechanical robots. An overly human appearance in robots is frightening and engenders a feeling of uneasiness. Mori in his 1970 essay states that a smile is a dynamic deformation of the face, where the sequence and rate of deformation are crucial. When the speed is halved trying to make the robot smile slowly, instead of looking happy, the robot’s expression becomes scary and unsettling (Mori 2012).

It shows that, given certain deviations in movements, something that has visually achieved a close resemblance to a person – for example, a robot, doll or virtual character – can easily fall into the uncanny valley.

Methodology

Triangulation is a pluralistic approach that uses different methods to look at the research topic from different points of view and would create a diverse set of data. Namely, methodical triangulation leads to an in-depth study of a phenomenon (Donkoh, Mensah 2023). Triangulation is a concept that often is used in qualitative research when quality issues are discussed. The main link between triangulation and the quality of qualitative research is that triangulation means the researcher expands the activities in the process beyond what is “normally” done, for example, by using more than one method. However, triangulation is not limited to promoting qualitative research or quality assurance but is also used to extend the insights gained in qualitative research (Flick 2018, 2–3).

Since virtual influencers are a multidisciplinary phenomenon that, in addition to technological and communication science aspects, also combines psychology, sociology, etc., accordingly, it seems reasonable to study this phenomenon with several methods, thus obtaining a general understanding of the research subject.

One of the strategies and methods of qualitative research data collection is semi-structured interview. During the semi-structured interview, the researcher asks the respondents a series of predetermined questions and pre-defined but open-ended questions. In this way, the researcher has a greater control over the subject of the interview in comparison to unstructured interviews, but unlike structured interviews or questionnaires that use closed questions, semi-structured interviews do not have fixed answers for each question range. Semi-structured interviews are probably the most common type of interviewing technique and they are popular in qualitative research. The semi-structured interview gives the researcher some flexibility in how and in what order to ask questions to the interviewee. This means that the researcher can actively listen to what the respondent says during the interview and use these responses to modify or even ask new follow-up questions related to the participant’s individual experience. Partly because structured interviews are a useful technique to apply in research to obtain as profound and comprehensive data about the topic as possible. In the process, new perspectives can be revealed, which might not have been initially noted or considered by the researcher while formulating the interview questions (O’Reilly, Dogra 2017, 37–48).

Focus groups are group discussions that explore a specific set of issues. The group is “focused” in such an aspect that it engages in a particular type of

collective activity, for example, watching a video, examining individual messages, or simply debating about a set of issues. It is important that focus groups are clearly distinguished from the broader category of group interviews using group interaction to generate data. Instead of asking questions to each participant, in focus group the researchers encourage participants to talk to each other by asking questions, exchanging opinions and commenting on each other's experiences and judgments (Kitzinger, Barbour 1999, 5).

Methodologically, focus group interviews involve a group of 6–8 like-minded people who have similar social and cultural background, experiences and concerns about a topic. Participants can be brought together to discuss a particular problem in a specific environment where participants feel comfortable to engage in a dynamic discussion for an hour or two, led by a discussion moderator. The purpose of focus groups is not to reach a consensus on the issues discussed. Rather, focus groups promote a variety of responses that provide a better understanding of participants' attitudes, behaviours, opinions or perception of the research topic (Liamputtong 2011, 3–5).

Focus group tasks can be distinguished by their research purpose, types of information and acquired knowledge, its scientific status and methodological factors. Considering the purpose of the study context, here the research tasks differ from both clinical and experimental tasks. Creating, collecting, identifying, discovering, explaining and generating feelings and behaviours, – all of these are the objectives of exploratory research (Fern 2001, 5).

Content analysis is a research technique for making repeatable and valid conclusions in the context of their use from texts (or other meaningful material). Technically, content analysis includes specialized procedures. They are learnable and separable from the researcher's personal authority and point of view, so can be considered objective. As a research technique, content analysis provides new insights, increases the researcher's understanding of specific phenomena or provides information about practical activities. Content analysis is a scientific tool and a reliable method. More specifically, a research method should produce findings that are replicable. This means that researchers who are working at different points in time and possibly under different conditions should produce the same results, applying the same technique to the same phenomena. Repeatability is the most important type of reliability (Krippendorff 2019, 2).

In its turn, qualitative content analysis is a method for meaningful and systematic description of qualitative data. This is achieved by assigning categories from a coding frame to successive parts of analysed material. This framework is the basis of the method and contains all the aspects for description and interpretation of the material. The method is characterized by three features: qualitative content analysis reduces the amount of data, it is systematic and flexible (Schreier 2014, 2).

Belgian visual sociologist and communication scholar Luc Pauwels points out that websites are unique contemporary cultural expressions, and therefore they constitute a huge potential data store about an action and ways of thinking in modern society and culture. According to Pauwels, for websites to be analysed, they require a method that respects their multimodal and multimedia characteristics. For example, his view is that visual analysis should involve more than simply the number of images and the quantification of their direct content categories (people, buildings, events and artifacts) or categorization of the representation into basic categories, such as types of people, events, and artifacts. He contended that investigation must go beyond quantitative content analysis and include visual representation qualitative aspects. To achieve this goal, Pauwels proposed six steps, which he called “multimodal frameworks for website analysis”: quality preservation of the first impression; the characteristic quantitative listing of noticeable and absent features; in-depth analysis of content and formal choices (written, visual markers, layout); point of view, tone of voice and audience analysis; organization of information (navigation); contextual analysis (technological platform capabilities and restrictions) (Carneiro, Johnson 2014).

Results

Since the representation of socially relevant issues in the communication of virtual influencers is a multidisciplinary phenomenon, several theories were used to explain it. Although virtual influencers are computer-generated characters, according to social agency theory people naturally perceive virtual characters as social actors, with certain anthropomorphic properties. This perception leads people to behave socially towards virtual agents by applying social rules to them, such as politeness and ethical norms.

The representation of socially important issues in the communication of virtual influencers can be classified as a simulation that, according to French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, is far from false view of the world, – it constructs a “real” world that can be identified as hyperreal or an accurate representation of reality. Although the represented social problems are real (LGBTQ+ discrimination, ageism, non-inclusive society, etc.), however, a virtual image does not come into contact with these issues in everyday life, hence, a certain level of deception and simulation is involved that contributes to the formation of a negative connotation by users in the context of virtual influencers.

Socially significant issues in the communication of virtual influencers in social medium *Instagram* may be defined as the topics where a virtual influencer represents certain opinions, expresses complaints or claims regarding the existing order of affairs in the society. Solving social problems requires the influencer to focus on a specific behaviour and expression of certain requirements, for example,



Figure 2. World’s first virtual influencer with Down syndrome @itskamisworld

prompting society towards tolerance, creating inclusive social media, advocating environmental protection etc. Social problems are defined by people in terms of activity and behaviour, which they recognize as burdensome. In short, social problems are constructed socially in the interaction of individual actions and participants over a long period of time.

Social agency theory posits that, if an animate agent has life-like characteristics and behaviour, it promotes social engagement, thereby allowing for a simulated human connection with the virtual agent. Meanwhile, an important factor that shapes people’s attitude towards virtual agents and how agents and their visual appearance are perceived is an uncanny valley effect, – greater people’s sympathy and empathy are acquired by virtual beings that do not too perfectly resemble a human, but rather look like mechanical robots or fantastic characters.

Virtual influencers can be seen as a meaningful and appropriate tool for communication of socially relevant issues on the social medium *Instagram*. However, there must be additional conditions for communication to be considered successful and effective, or to achieve a significant audience engagement factor, implementing real changes in society.

- One condition would be the selection of an appropriate topic and/or socially significant issue, for example, ecology and environmental topics, protection of endangered animal species, recycling. The topic is also subordinated to the visual appearance of the virtual image, the tone of communication.
- The second aspect to consider is that, similar to the predecessor of virtual influencers Kyoko, created by the agency *HoriPro* in 1980, failed to gain a stable audience’s interest and sympathy. Likewise, in the case of contemporary virtual influencers, lasting attention of the audience is hard to maintain. Initially, as a new technological phenomenon, it can be fascinating to the audience, however, in the long term this interest is quite difficult to sustain. Therefore, most often virtual characters are used for short-term projects, where virtual influencers in some cases experience their digital

death, thus emphasizing the seriousness of the problem they are trying to communicate.

- Similarly, in the focus group discussion, respondents indicated that, although in a communication of socially significant issues they still prefer a real person, if information is presented in a concise and consistent form, virtual influencers can and should be used.

Speaking of new dimensions and techniques that appear while using virtual influencers in communication of socially important issues, some quite simple and obvious things can be considered. Virtual influencers do not have to sleep or eat, they do not require remuneration, nor will they fall into temptations distinctively characteristic of humans. In short, they are available 24/7 and easily controlled, they do not possess ethical and moral principles. Yet, it should be taken into account that virtual influencers are often created by agencies and teams that control the content of the virtual being and thus the ethical and moral principles of the creative team are transferred to the content of the virtual influencer. Virtual influencers also offer a certain type of distance, because there are sensitive topics and things where people might be ashamed or would like to maintain some anonymity. A virtual avatar can be used to do or represent things which a real person is not able to do, – then it could be considered that the message and the chosen communication technique has an added value.

Representation of socially important issues on *Instagram* using virtual influencers is most evident in hashtags and visual material. However, it is important to note that this particular medium is not well suited for social activism, simply because *Instagram* focuses primarily on visual content. Images are visible in the primary view, only with additional actions it is possible to access the text message. Thus, the content of the text is secondary compared to the image. Meanwhile, it should be emphasized that in most cases, socially significant problems which are represented in the visual content can be read by viewing the entire profile and its visual content as a whole, as well as obtaining additional information outside *Instagram* about the conceptual idea of content creators.

The areas where the use of virtual influencers can be a successful technique in representation of socially relevant issues is the protection of the environment and animals, where a virtual character that is not able to do this in real life could communicate with the audience, for example, a virtual bee (@bee_nfluencer) that communicates with other users about the issues concerning bee conservation and protection. With the assistance of virtual influencers, it is possible to talk about the topics where, for objective or ethical reasons, it would not be appropriate to involve the people themselves, for example, those who have encountered severe and/or traumatic experiences and would prefer to maintain anonymity. Nevertheless, this aspect should be further scrutinized in practice and future research.



Figure 3. The first virtual bee influencer @bee_nfluencer

Conclusions

The interdisciplinarity of the topic opens wide opportunities for further research directions, because technological aspects intertwine with communicative processes and social phenomena, where results can be surprising. Along with the development of artificial intelligence, fully autonomous agents can emerge in the realm of virtual beings. These agents will be able to independently interact with the audience. Furthermore, motion capture and image generation technologies, along with the rapid pace of development of artificial intelligence, could be achieved to such a level that virtual beings will no longer be distinguishable from real people. If new virtual influencer profiles will appear, new topics and questions are bound to emerge represented by means of virtual characters. A greater number of virtual influencers on the social medium *Instagram* will yield a larger amount of data for research, which may open up opportunities for identifying new regularities and making valuable discoveries.

Author's note. The article is based on a master's thesis developed in 2023 and defended in the master's study programme "Communication Science" at the University of Latvia Faculty of Social Sciences. The research supervisor of the thesis is Assistant Professor Klinta Ločmele.

REFERENCES

- Arsenyan, J., Mirowska, A. (2021). Almost Human? A Comparative Case Study on the Social Media Presence of Virtual Influencers. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 155, 102694, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2021.102694>
- Atkinsona, R. K., Mayerb, R. E., Merrill, M. M. (2005). Fostering Social Agency in Multimedia Learning: Examining the Impact of an Animated Agents Voice. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 30(1), 117–139, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2004.07.001>

- Berryman, R., Abidin, C., Leaver, T. (2021). A Topography of Virtual Influencers. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*. #AoIR2020: The 22nd Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers Virtual Event / 13–16 Oct. 2021, pp. 1–6, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2021i0.12145>
- Carneiro, L., Johnson, M. (2014). Quantitative and Qualitative Visual Content Analysis in the Study of Websites. In: *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 1*. SAGE Publications Ltd, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/978144627305013517800>
- Donkoh, D., Mensah, J. (2023). Application of Triangulation in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Applied Biotechnology and Bioengineering*, 10(1), 6–9, DOI: [10.15406/jabb.2023.10.00319](https://doi.org/10.15406/jabb.2023.10.00319)
- Fern, E. F. (2001). *Advanced Focus Group Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc., DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412990028>
- Flick, U. (2018). *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Methods: Why Triangulation and Mixed Methods in Qualitative Research?* SAGE Publications Ltd, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716634>
- Giddings, S. (2007). Dionysiac Machines: Videogames and the Triumph of the Simulacra. *Convergence*, 13(4), 417–431, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507082204>
- Gross, E.-C. (2022). Transparency of Virtual Influencers' Sponsored Posts: Observations on the First Romanian Virtual Influencer, Ana Tobor. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366517406>
- Harre, R. (1984). Some Reflections on the Concept of “Social Representation”. *Social Research*, 51(4), 927–938, DOI: <http://www.doi.org/stable/40970971>
- Hegarty, P. (2008). Constructing (in) the “Real” World: Simulation and Architecture in Baudrillard. *French Cultural Studies*, 19(3), 317–331, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957155808094943>
- Howarth, C. (2011). Representations, Identity and Resistance in Communication. In: Hook, D., Bradley, F., Bauer, M. W. (eds). *The Social Psychology of Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 153–168. Retrieved from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/35983>
- Jackson, R. B., Williams, T. (2021). A Theory of Social Agency for Human–Robot Interaction. *Front Robot AI*, 13(8), 687726, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/frobt.2021.687726>
- Kitzinger, J., Barbour, R. (1999). Introduction: the challenge and promise of focus groups. In: Barbour, R., Kitzinger, J. (eds). *Developing Focus Group Research*. SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 1–20, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208857>
- Krippendorff, K. (2019). *Content Analysis: Conceptual Foundation*. SAGE Publications, Inc., DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878781>
- Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus Group Methodology: Introduction and History*. SAGE Publications Ltd, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957657>
- Monti, A., Rozzonelli, C. (eds). (2015). *Experiments in Film Appreciation*. Lulu.com.
- Miao, F., Kozlenkova, I. V., Wang, H., Xie, T., & Palmatier, R. W. (2022). An Emerging Theory of Avatar Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(1), 67–90, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242921996646>
- Mori, M. (2012). The Uncanny Valley. *IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine*, 19(2), 98–100, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1109/MRA.2012.2192811>

O'Reilly, M., Dogra, N. (2017). *Interviewing Children and Young People for Research*. SAGE Publications Ltd, DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526419439>

Schreier, M. (2014). *Qualitative Content Analysis*. SAGE Publications Ltd, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243>

Scorzin, P. C. (2021). More Human than Human. Digital Dolls on Social Media. *Denkste Puppe: Multidisziplinäre Zeitschrift für Mensch-Puppen-Diskurse*, 1, 157–166. Retrieved from: https://dedo.ub.uni-siegen.de/index.php/de_do/article/view/119

Weber, R. (2003). Editor's Comments: Still Desperately Seeking the IT Artifact. *MIS Quarterly*, 27(3), iii–xi. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261849977>

Communication of JSC “*Sadales Tīkls*” and JSC “*Augstsprieguma Tīkls*” about Tariff Changes

Marks Skujiņš

University of Latvia

E-mail: marksskujins@gmail.com

Abstract. The purpose of the study is to evaluate how the communication of JSC “*Sadales tīkls*” and JSC “*Augstsprieguma tīkls*” about tariff changes using different communication channels and tools affects the public opinion about the companies that provide electricity supply in Latvia. The study consists of a theoretical part, which describes the theories used in the research, as well as their application; the methodological part, which describes the research methods used in the work and their application therein, and the empirical part, which consists of the results of the methods used in the study, the data obtained and the conclusions reached during the study, as well as recommendations for improving communication for each of the investigated companies. In the framework of the research, communication representatives of JSC “*Sadales tīkls*” and JSC “*Augstsprieguma tīkls*” were interviewed; 209 Latvian residents were surveyed using the electronic questionnaire method; a content analysis was conducted in digital media and social media. As a result of the research, it was established how the crisis communication by JSC “*Sadales tīkls*” and JSC “*Augstsprieguma tīkls*” affected the public opinion about these companies, as well as the communication practice and experience in communicating about tariff changes were compared.

Keywords: tariffs, electricity, communication, crisis, JSC “*Sadales tīkls*”, JSC “*Augstsprieguma tīkls*”

Introduction

Energy supply, renewable energy resources and other issues related to energy production are gaining relevancy in Latvia due to the rapid increase in energy resource prices last spring. After the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Republic on 24 February 2022, the rise in energy prices caused a crisis in this sector across the entire Eastern Europe. The topic of energy independence also gained currency for the people of Latvia, as they started to produce energy on a local scale or even individually in households. This is especially topical when producing electricity

using solar panel systems or wind stations. Data shows that the most used type of electricity production for household needs or self-consumption are solar panel stations called microgenerators – in October 2022, their total number in Latvia exceeded 10 thousand (Sadales tīkls 2022).

The company that provides electricity supply to most households in Latvia, including the connection of solar panel stations to the electricity grid is JSC “Sadales tīkls” (hereinafter referred to as ST). A big challenge for the electricity system operators today is the fact that currently customers actively produce electricity themselves, which transfers to the electricity network, although the electricity network in Latvia has historically been made to conduct electricity in only one direction – from the electricity producer to its consumer. To ensure this process as successfully as possible, electricity transmission and distribution operators regularly carry out network modernization and development works. The total length of ST’s electricity network in Latvia reaches almost 93 000 km, with the number of customer facilities exceeding 1.1 million. ST is a part of the JSC “Latvenergo” concern, 100% of ST’s shares are held by AS “Latvenergo”.

ST once in the regulatory period regulated by the Public Services Regulatory Committee (hereinafter referred to as SPRK) reviews the electricity distribution tariff, including and updating the relevant components, as well as evaluating the conformity of the tariff methodology with the current situation. The tariff provides the company with income to ensure the maintenance and modernization of the electricity network. More than 95% of Latvian households are connected to the electricity distribution network, hence, if the electricity distribution tariff increases, it impacts almost every electricity consumer in Latvia, especially the companies, whose electricity consumption is significantly higher than that of the households. As a result of the increase in the price of the service, the risk can turn into a crisis, which directly affects the way of communication and strategy of the company.

The development and revision of the electricity distribution and transmission tariff is a complicated process. The company JSC “Augstsprieguma tīkls” (hereinafter referred to as AST) is the main and only electricity transmission operator in Latvia. The large electricity producers transfer the produced electricity to AST, then electricity goes to ST, and afterwards – to the majority of Latvia’s electricity producers. Since ST’s clients are located all over the territory of Latvia and almost every citizen of Latvia uses the provided service, the information flow in involves both direct communication with the client using telephone communication, e-mail and social networks, as well as public communication using the media, social networks and organizing public events, discussion of changes in public services.

Corporate communication management is the involvement of all interested parties in the creation of communication. To create successful corporate communication, its management requires the involvement of top management, who can

integrate these aspects of corporate communication into the company’s goals and execution plans. Another important aspect in the context of corporate governance is financial indicators, from which corporate communication has a significant impact, and communication can significantly affect financial indicators, depending on their success and performance factors (Mohamad *et al.* 2014).

A successfully created corporate identity can maintain successful relations with all interested parties. Undeniably, businesses transform over time, and their identity can change as time goes by and the business evolves. However, this should be done thoughtfully and in a structured manner, so as not to create potential risks of reputation and communication crisis (Melewar *et al.* 2005).

Unsuccessful creation or management of corporate identity can lead to several types of risks, moreover, the risks can develop into a crisis, hence, it is essential for companies to draw up a corporate identity structure appropriate for the company’s operations.

Risk management and identification of risks are intended to pre-emptively prevent the occurrence of a potential crisis, as risks can turn into a crisis. However, there are risks that cannot be predicted, so an even more essential part of the plan is to draw up a crisis prevention mechanism that includes crisis communication as a part of the strategy (Zhang 2020).

Risk management in a company or organization includes some important stages and actions that complement each other. A set of six actions has been defined by the Polish researcher Lech A. Grzelak, who describes them, as follows:

- identification of risks, which is one of the most important actions in order to eliminate these potential risks;
- measuring and analysing the effect of potential risks and possible consequences for the company;
- evaluating and studying the most suitable method for risk management;
- identifying and choosing the most appropriate tool, evaluating the costs and returns for each tool;
- choosing the most suitable methods for identifying and preventing the specific risk;
- evaluating the return of the chosen methods and tools by studying their results and performance (Grzelak 2003).

Methodology

To successfully fulfil the set research goal and tasks, the author has used various research methods: a quantitative content analysis, a survey, an interview and a case study analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are employed to make the study as versatile as possible. Before conducting the public surveys, company employees who are responsible for the communication function

in each of the companies have been surveyed, so that the obtained results could then be compared with the results obtained in the public surveys. This contributes to understanding whether the communication implemented by the company in terms of content meets the expectations of public. All these methods have been used during the current research to enable considering the researched topic from several points of view, as well as to compare the applied approaches and the public's position concerning each of the companies before and after the tariff changes in the conclusion section. Furthermore, the study explores the impact that the tariff changes have had on society, including an insight into reputational changes.

Results

Communication about electricity distribution and transmission tariffs takes place on a regular basis, as the tariffs are reviewed every few years and each company has a different period of review. Public interest in the distribution and transmission tariff applied to electricity previously has not been high, as the changes over the years have been negligible, but as the communication representatives of both companies point out, this time tariff change process is unique, and the previous experience of tariff changes is currently of little use in terms of communication. With the help of quantitative content analysis, it was possible to establish how actively the electricity supply companies ST and AST communicated on the topic of the tariff in social networks during the researched period. The content analysis demonstrates that the greatest difference was in the form of communication, – comparing the number of posts in social media showed that ST had made 51, whereas AST – only 6. This finding confirms that ST chose to proactively communicate with public concerning the topic of the tariff increase in social media, while AST did it reactively and formally, according to company audiences. The results of the survey revealed that the respondents most often chose to obtain information about tariff changes from internet, television and social networks. However, a significant part (94 respondents) also looked for information on the websites of ST or electricity traders. Radio and print media are the considerably less-used sources where information is sought about electricity distribution and transmission tariff changes. The greatest majority noted that they rated the communication about the tariff increase as generally below average, meaning that they had not received a detailed explanation or had not heard about tariff changes at all.

Conclusions

Since the companies ST and AST are strategically important providers of electricity infrastructure, these companies must pay immense attention to public

communication related to changes in service prices, in particular – the increase thereof. It is essential to work both on strategic communication planning and crisis communication plans, as well as analyse the public reaction to the communication. Furthermore, a communication plan must be created that meets the communicative specifics of society and the industry. It is just as indispensable to maintain relations with the parties involved, including the media, to be able to implement communication more effectively, explaining one's opinion and offering expertise. By regularly creating interesting and informative content on social media, businesses can build their audience, which can be useful for conveying essential information. In practice, communication about price increases has never had a positive reaction from the public, consequently, the companies need to communicate and justify the expected price increase as much as possible, so that the public understands the reasons for the price increase. It is crucial not only to communicate the price as such, but also to explain how this price is formed and clarify the need for changes.

Comparing the communication of the two companies in digital channels in greater detail, it can be concluded that the type of communication in each company's case differed significantly during the research period. Looking at the communicated content, it was possible to notice differences in the application of communication methods, the type of communicated content and the numerical amount of published content units. As company representatives have stated in the interviews, the approach of each company can be explained by the specifics of its audience. The audience of ST consists predominantly of Latvian households and companies, while for AST they are mostly business customers or electricity producers and legal entities. Furthermore, it was established that the communication practices of both companies included differences in the choice of various methods and channels. However, since ST is also the largest customer of AST, the communication should be created and managed in a unified way, because the AST tariff has a significant impact on the ST tariff and its increase.

- ST implemented crisis communication in the public space, communicating proactively, as the public was actively involved in the communication and discussion of the tariff process.
- AST chose to communicate reactively in the public space, communicating more directly with customers, using their customer databases, which in the case of AST mostly consist of companies and legal entities.
- The results of the survey reveal that a large number of respondents are not entirely sure what the ST and AST companies are doing. This makes it difficult for companies to communicate, because an additional barrier must be overcome to work with public awareness and to be able to accurately predict the audience's reaction.

- The survey responses confirmed that most respondents did not follow ST and AST social media accounts, although they used these channels to obtain information daily. The respondents indicated television and digital media portals as the main source of obtaining information about electricity tariff changes.
- A large number of respondents do not know what components are included in the electricity bill, consequently, they have formed a wrong idea about the impact of the tariff increase on the total electricity bill. Therefore, when seeing the percentage of the increase, it was a false assumption that it would be an increase in the total bill, as the companies had not explained exactly what the planned price increase was for.
- The public opinion concerning the companies ST and AST is much more positive than the opinion regarding the tariff communication from the companies.
- Survey respondents reveal that the opinion about the companies ST and AST has deteriorated significantly during the communication of the tariff changes, which can be explained by the resonance of the public, which has been augmented by the involvement of various politicians and government representatives during the tariff changes.
- Companies had to react and communicate promptly, because decisions from their makers came unexpectedly and rapidly. If the management of the companies and the involved parties had involved the communication representatives sooner, it would have been possible to prepare a more detailed and successful communication strategy and plan.
- Respondents support the production of green energy, and a large number of them plan to or have already installed solar panels in their household in the future, these company customers have an increased interest in the increase of ST and AST tariffs, and they also engage in discussions in the digital media on the topic of the electricity tariff changes.
- Most of the content about ST and AST tariff changes is communicated in media, but the users of company services do not specifically look for information about tariff changes in these sources, therefore, most of them do not delve into the information provided by companies, as it is complex and detailed, according to company representatives. At the same time, the respondents indicate that they would like to receive an explanation about the tariff increase in a way that is easy to understand and worded in a comprehensible manner.

According to Pamela Ferrante Walaski's method of dividing the crisis into 4 stages, it is concluded that:

1. During the crisis identification phase, both researched companies encountered a rapid reaction from the public, which manifested itself in the form of various crisis signals both in the digital environment and in the mass media.

2. The moment when public criticism of the submitted planned tariff changes emerged, which could pose a threat to the companies' reputation, can be considered as the stage of worsening conditions.
3. During the crisis response phase, companies communicated proactively and reactively about the reasons for the tariff increase, using various channels.
4. Companies can start performing the activities included in the reflection stage only at present, as the tariff has been approved only at the end of May 2023 (Walaski 2011).

Since the crisis reflection stage coincides with the final stage of the master's thesis, the author notes that it is important for companies to evaluate the set of proposals, as well as to assess their application in communication practice to be able to use them effectively and efficiently.

REFERENCES

- Grzelak, L. A. (2003). *Risk Management – Key to Stability*. WIB Publishing House. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Risk-management-process-Source-the-authors-own-study-on-the-basis-of-Lech-A-Risk_fig1_281220971
- Melewar, T. C., Karaosmanoglu, E., Paterson, D. (2005). Corporate Identity: Concept, Components and Contribution. *Journal of General Management*, 31, 59–81, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/030630700503100104>
- Mohamad, B., Abu Bahar, H., Halim H., Ismail, R. A. (2014). Corporate Communication Management (CCM) and Organisational Performance: A Review of the Current Literature, Conceptual Model and Research Propositions. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 155, 115–122, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.266>
- Sadales tīkls. (2022). Elektribu pašražojošu mājsaimniecību skaits Latvijā sasniedz 10 000 [The Number of Self-Producing Electricity Households in Latvia Reaches 10 000]. *sadalestikls.lv*, Oct. 19. Retrieved from: <https://sadalestikls.lv/lv/prezes-relizes/elektribu-pasrazojosu-majsaimniecibu-skaits-latvija-sasniedz-10-000>
- Walaski, P. F. (2011). *Risk and Crisis Communications*. Hoboken.
- Zhang, S. (2020). *The New Horizon of China's Economic Law Theory*. China Renmin University Press; Springer, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-8824-2_5

Media Generation and Media Consumption in Latvia in Autumn 2022

Vita Zelče

University of Latvia

E-mail: vita.zelce@lu.lv

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5169-8862>

Abstract. The article offers an insight into the data of the representative survey of the population of Latvia conducted in the autumn of 2022 concerning the media consumption and the priorities of news' thematic interests. The survey collects data on differences in the use of media types in different age groups. The research has concluded that the most noticeable difference is observed between the people in the age group 18–24 years and 65+ years, while the media usage habits of the age group 25–64 are quite similar. Survey data show that in almost all age groups the priority of thematic interests is the news of Latvia. At the end of the research, it was concluded that it was not possible to create a classification and characteristics of Latvian media generations only based on the analysis of survey data.

Keywords: media generations, media consumptions, age group, news priorities, survey

Introduction

The concept of generations is used in the social sciences and humanities to structure the course of history, to characterise its phases and the specificity of its changes. In recent decades, a wide range of theoretical literature on generations has been produced and various classifications of generations have been proposed. One approach is the concept of media generations, which is used to describe people's relationship with traditional and new media, technology, access to information, media literacy and attitudes towards advertising. Generations form their own specific patterns of media use based on the type of media that was/is new in their formative years. This pattern is the one to which a given generation largely remains faithful throughout its lifespan. The dominant media in generational usage is used to name the generation, e.g., “newspaper generation”, “TV generation” or “network generation” (Goot *et al.* 2018, 289–290). Data on the Latvian media ecosystem demonstrate marked differences between generations in the use of traditional and new media (see Zelče *et al.* 2023). The aim of this article is to establish the character of these differences and their extent.

Methodology

The research is based on theoretical approaches to generations and media generations, as well as on Baltic scholars' insights into the specificity of generational classification in the region in the 20th century shaped by dramatic historical turbulences (e.g., Aarelaid-Tart 2006; Nugin 2015; Nugin *et al.* 2016; Šūpulis, Zellis 2019/2020). The study analyses data from a representative survey of Latvian citizens on media use and news preferences, commissioned by the Latvian Council of Science's Fundamental and Applied Research Programme project "Jeopardizing Democracy Through Disinformation and Conspiracies: Reconsidering Experience of Latvia". The survey took place in autumn 2022 and involved 1621 residents of Latvia. Respondents were selected to form a representative set reflecting Latvian society demographically, geographically and socially. The interviews were conducted in Latvian or Russian (at the respondent's choice).

The research seeks to answer the question: what are the differences in media consumption and news preferences across generations of the Latvian population?

Results

1. Media generations

Generation is a widespread concept in contemporary media studies and academic discussion. The idea of generations is an old one. "Generation" or a similar term was already used to describe the distance between parents and children. However, the generational approach emerged as a significant scientific concept relatively recently – in the early 20th century. It was given a sociological perspective by the influential theorist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) in his classic essay "The Problem of Generation" (1928) (Misztal 2003, 83–84). His theorising was inspired by the social movements initiated by young people since the 18th century. Mannheim sometimes uses the terms "generation" and "youth" synonymously, emphasising that each new socio-economic period is mostly identified with the socially and intellectually active youth of that era (Lovell 2007, 7). Mannheim developed his theory of generations as an alternative to Karl Marx's class theory, which argued that social class was the historical subject and the driving force of social change. For Mannheim, the social subject was the generation as a group of people of similar age and similar location with similar attitudes towards what was happening in society and similar aspirations. Every generation is marked by a characteristic "social location" in an historical context and is influenced especially by the experiences and events occurring in the formative phase of an individual's younger years. Later life events are also of great importance, especially their turning points. All this together forms the biography of both an individual and a generation (Mannheim 1952, 282).

Mannheim emphasizes the importance of “fresh contact”, it is the moment when an individual is encountered with something new. The experience of a generation is formed through these “fresh contacts”, and they have an impact on the whole future life (Mannheim 1952, 293). “Fresh contact” is important in generational relations with communication technologies and new media.

Mannheim’s generational concept has inspired many theorists to develop it further and offer their own approaches (e. g., Eisenstadt 1956; Kertzer 1983; Strauss, Howe 1991; Eyerman, Turner 1998; Edmunds, Turner 2002). Among them are also media generational theories, which describe different generational media experiences and their usage habits. Hepp and his colleagues suggested that media generation forms “groups of people who in their media appropriation share a specific experience space of mediatization and subsequently, based on their personal media biographies” and develops “a shared self-image as a media generation” (Hepp *et al.* 2017, 111). Bolin points out that the concept of media generations is relative, as it is difficult to draw boundaries between different age groups, their relationships with technologies, media consumption habits, and the media landscapes of their lives. However, the media generations approach is often used to explain the history of mediatization and its contemporary processes (Bolin 2017, 130–132). The media generation approach is widely used in comparative media use studies of different population groups of the same country or region, as well as of different countries/regions. It helps to structure the data, systematize the biographies of media consumers and obtain an overall picture of the situation.

2. Media usage in in different age groups Latvia in 2022

In the survey of Latvian citizens in the autumn of 2022, the question was asked: “Which media do you use to obtain information about current events?” (see Table 1).

Table 1. Media consumption in different age groups in autumn 2022 (%)

Media	Age													
	18–24		25–34		35–44		45–54		55–64		65+		Average	
	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Print media	96	4	93	7	91	9	92	8	87	13	76	14	88	12
Radio	78	22	70	30	65	35	65	35	60	30	50	50	63	37
TV	60	40	62	38	54	46	48	52	42	58	24	76	46	54
News portals	36	54	24	76	25	75	22	78	24	76	42	58	28	72
Social media	51	49	59	41	72	28	76	24	77	23	89	11	74	26

Survey data show that news portals are the main source of current information for almost all population groups. The only exception is people over the age of 65. People of this age group mainly use television for getting the latest news, however, they also like to use news portals and radio to attain information. Television was the “fresh contact” for people of this generation, whose members were born before the Second World War, during the war and in the post-war years. This communication technology entered the Latvian media landscape in the second half of the 1950s and its use became a habit in the 1960s, when these people were children, teenagers or young adults. People of this age group could be labelled as the “television generation”.

The most fragmented set of media habits is noted in the 18–24 age group. News portals and social media are almost equally important to this generation, however, a large part of it also uses television as a source of the latest information. Media selection habits are similar for people aged 25–64. According to the survey data, there is no deep “media gaps”, it is observed only between the oldest and the youngest age group.

3. Media consumption in the regions

The survey data suggests that age is not the only indicator of differences in media consumption. The use of one type of media differs in various regions of Latvia (see Table 2). The use of television to acquire the latest information is greater in rural regions than in Riga and in the more economically developed Pierīga region.

Table 2. Media consumption in regions of Latvia in autumn 2022 (%)

Media	Region													
	Riga		Pierīga		Vidzeme		Kurzeme		Zemgale		Latgale		Average	
	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Print media	91	9	89	11	89	11	84	16	88	12	88	12	88	12
Radio	64	36	56	44	71	29	63	37	61	39	63	37	63	37
TV	55	45	44	56	34	66	30	70	45	55	52	48	46	54
News portals	24	76	25	75	33	67	38	62	29	71	31	69	28	72
Social media	71	29	77	23	72	28	71	29	74	26	78	22	74	26

4. Media consumption in groups with different education

Survey data show that education also determines media use preferences (see Table 3). People with lower education level have a greater preference for traditional media, whereas better educated people have better skills in using new technologies to obtain the latest information. However, this factor is not as significant as belonging to particular age groups

Table 3. Media consumption in groups with different educations in autumn 2022 (%)

Media	Level of education															
	Incomplete primary		Primary		Incomplete secondary		Secondary		Secondary vocational		Incomplete higher		Higher education		Average	
	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Print media	100	0	93	7	85	15	90	10	86	14	92	8	87	12	88	12
Radio	67	33	69	31	64	36	64	36	61	39	65	35	62	38	63	37
TV	67	33	43	57	41	59	44	56	42	57	58	42	50	50	46	54
News portals	67	33	67	33	51	49	29	71	29	71	24	76	18	82	28	72
Social media	67	33	65	35	75	25	72	28	79	21	73	27	72	28	74	29

5. Thematic priorities of media news

The survey data show that there are significant differences between the news thematic priorities of the older and younger generations. This is evidenced by the respondents' answers to the question: "What topics in the media interest you?" (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Young people are primarily interested in music, news of Latvia and sports, while information from Latvia, local news and environmental issues are the most important to people aged 65+. According to the survey data, both of these generations are interested in Latvian events, although the interest is numerically greater amongst the older generation.

VITA ZELČE. Media Generation and Media Consumption in Latvia in Autumn 2022

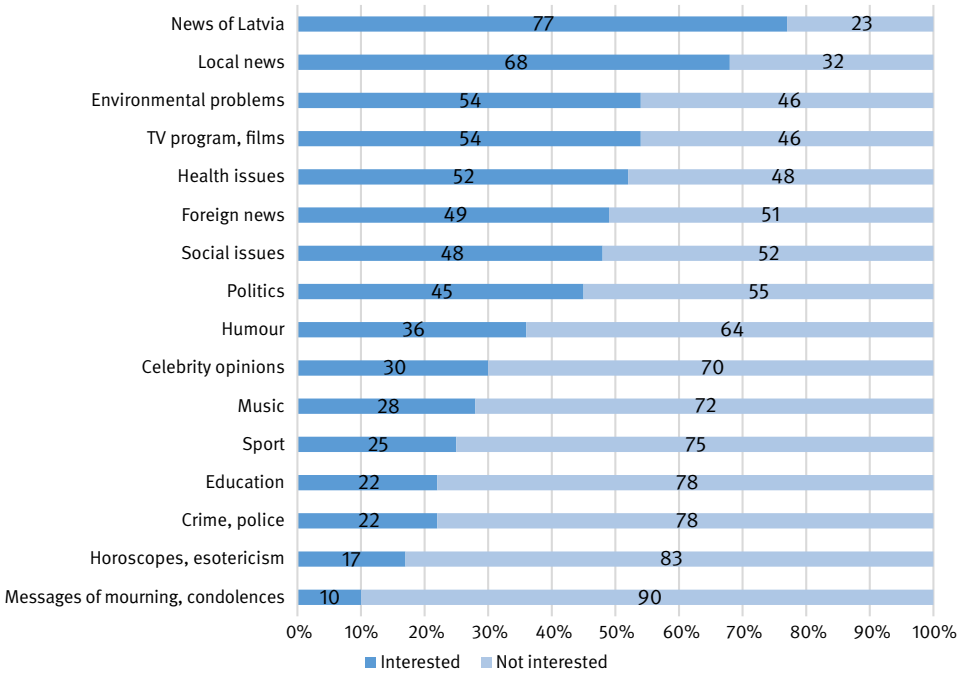


Figure 1. Priorities of media news in the age group 65+ years in autumn 2022 (%)

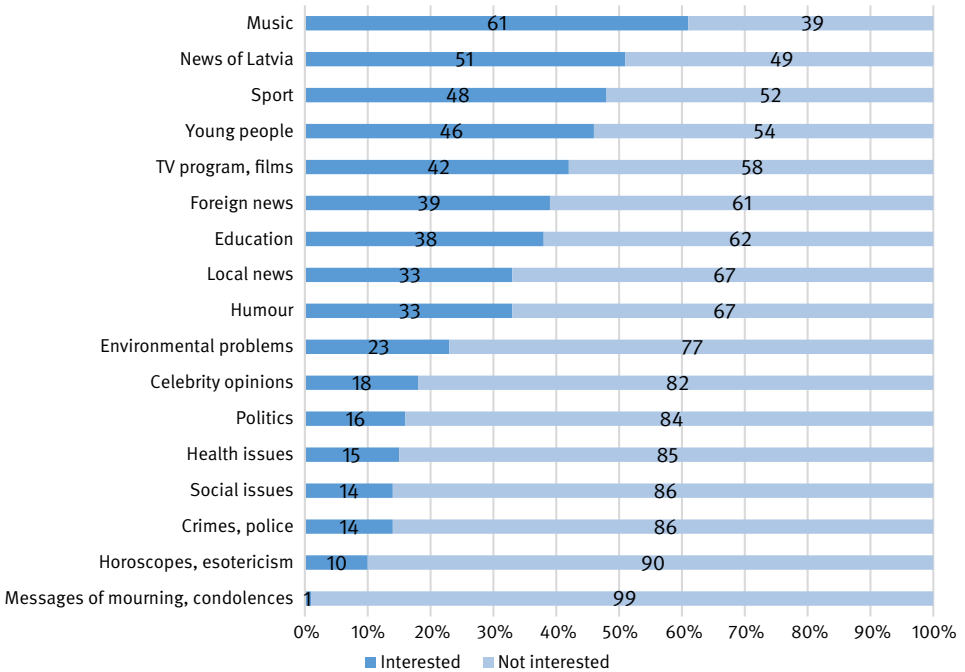


Figure 2. Priorities of media news in the age group 18–24 years in autumn 2022 (%)

VITA ZELČE. Media Generation and Media Consumption in Latvia in Autumn 2022

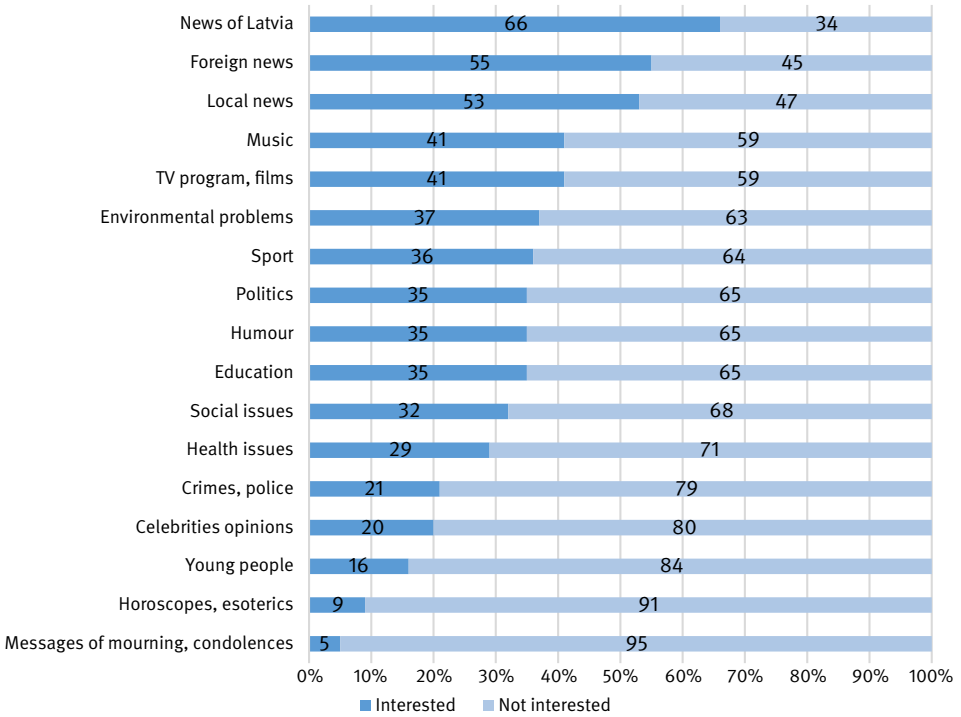


Figure 3. Priorities of media news in the age group 25–44 years in autumn 2022 (%)

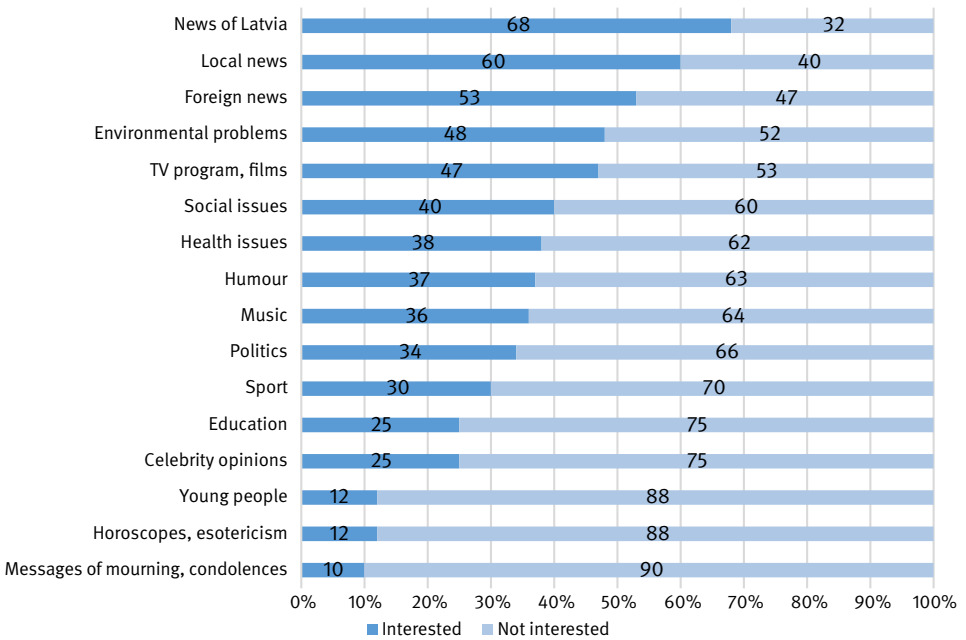


Figure 4. Priorities of media news in the age group 45–64 years in autumn 2022 (%)

Survey data show that different age groups have various priorities regarding current news obtained in the print media, radio, TV, news portals and social media. They also have a lot in common, for example, the news of Latvia is the most important for people aged 25 to 65+ (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Data on news priorities are an excellent source of information for creating the classification and characteristics of Latvian media generations.

Conclusions

The data of the survey conducted in the autumn of 2022 permits to conclude that different age groups have different habits of media consumption and news priorities. These differences are not very pronounced, the boundaries between generations are blurred in the use of certain types of media. Despite this, it is possible to create a classification of the media generations of the Latvian population, using the theoretical approaches of generations and media generations. The characteristics of media generations can be defined more profoundly by the data on media consumers' places of residence, education, occupation, income, gender and nationality. This information would supplement biographical descriptions of media generations.

It must be concluded that, unfortunately, the statistical data on habits of media consumption and consumers gathered in this article are insufficient to draw conclusions about media generations of Latvia and propose their labels. It is necessary to conduct in-depth interviews with representatives of different age groups and social groups in order to understand their relationship with different types of media and technologies, and to find out the topic of their interests.

Author's note: This research is funded by the Latvian Council of Science, project "Jeopardizing Democracy Through Disinformation and Conspiracies: Reconsidering Experience of Latvia", project No. lzp-2019/1-0278.

REFERENCES

- Aarelaid-Tart, A. (2006). *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*. Kikimora Publications.
- Bolin, G. (2017). *Media Generations. Experience, Identity and Mediatized Social Change*. Routledge.
- Edmunds, J., Turner, B. S. (eds). (2002). *Generational Consciousness, Narrative and Politics*. Rowman; Littlefield Publishers.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1956). *From Generation to Generation. Age Groups and Social Structure*. Glencoe Press.
- Eyerman, R., Turner, B. S. (1998). Outline of a Theory of Generations. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 1(1), 91–106, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/136843198001001007>

- Hepp, A., Berg, M., Roitsch, C. (2017). A Processual Concept of Media Generation. The Media-Generational Positioning of Elderly People. *Nordicom Review*, 38(1), 109–122, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0395>
- Goot, M. van der, Rozendaal, E., Oprea, S. J., Ketelaar, P. E., Smit, E. G. (2018). Media Generations and Their Advertising Attitudes and Avoidance: A Six-Country Comparison. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(2), 289–308, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2016.1240469>
- Kertzer, D. I. (1983). Generation as a Sociological Problem. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9, 125–49.
- Lovell, S. (2007). Introduction. In: Lovell, S. (ed.). *Generations in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–18.
- Mannheim, K. (1952). *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. Routledge; Kegan Paul.
- Misztal, B. A. (2003). *Theories of Social Remembering*. Open University Press.
- Nugin, R. (2015). *The 1970s: Portrait of a Generation at the Doorstep*. University of Tartu Press.
- Nugin, R., Kannike, A., Raudsepp, M. (2016). Introduction. Mapping generations in the Estonian context. In: Nugin, R., Kannike, A., Raudsepp, M. (eds). *Generations in Estonia: Contemporary Perspectives on Turbulent Times. Approaches to Culture Theory. Vol. 5*. University of Tartu Press, pp. 13–33.
- Strauss, W., Howe, N. (1991). *Generations. The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. Quill; William Morrow.
- Šūpulis, E., Zellis, K. (2019/2020). 20. gadsimta vēsturiskās paaudzes un to identifikācija Latvijas iedzīvotāju dzīvesstāstos [Historical Generations of the 20th Century and their Identification through Latvian Life Stories]. *Akadēmiskā Dzīve*, 55, 66–79, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22364/adz.55.09>
- Zelče, V., Lasmane, S., Zitmane, M. (eds). (2023). *Latvijas mediju ekoloģija 2020. gada pandēmijas krīzē* [Latvia's Media Ecology in the 2020 Pandemic Crisis]. LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

How It All Started. Discussion of Istanbul Convention in Latvian Daily Newspapers in 2016

Marita Zitmane

University of Latvia

E-mail: maritaz@edu.lu.lv

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1672-9520>

Abstract. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence provoked very similar negative reactions in different countries. In Latvia, too, ratification of the Istanbul Convention is pending (second half of 2023) and is strongly opposed by several political forces, opinion leaders and non-governmental organisations. The opponents of the Convention have been and continue to be actively engaged in public opinion building activities in support of their position. Media attitudes and actions have played and still retain a key role in this process. The aim of this article is to examine the discourse on the Istanbul Convention in the daily newspapers published in Latvia at the beginning of the negotiations.

Keywords: gender, anti-gender, media, discourse, gender-based violence

Introduction

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, or the Istanbul Convention has been the subject of political and public debate since 2016. During these seven years, misinformation and lies have spread around the Istanbul Convention. It should be stressed that the debate on the ratification of the Convention has been marked by disinformation since its inception. The aim of this article is to analyse the media coverage of the Istanbul Convention. The analysis was carried out in the Latvian dailies “*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*” (Independent Morning Newspaper), “*Lauku Avīze*” (Rural Newspaper), “*Diena*” (Day) and “*Vesti segodnya*” (News Today, a Russian-language newspaper published in Latvia), with the selected period from February 2016 to June 2016. The framework of the analysis was chosen because the first articles on the Istanbul Convention appeared in the press in February, in particular “Discussion: The Istanbul Convention will not be a panacea. Concerns

MARITA ZITMANE. How It All Started. Discussion of Istanbul Convention in Latvian Daily ..

VEDOKĻI

Konvencijas āža kājas - arvien uskatāmākas

Intervija ar akademiķi Stambulas konvencijas kritiķi, tiesību zinātnieku un specializāciju terapeitu Jānis Reirs. Kāpēc šis konvencijas kritiķis ir tik populārs? Kāpēc šis konvencijas kritiķis ir tik populārs? Kāpēc šis konvencijas kritiķis ir tik populārs?

Kāpēc šis konvencijas kritiķis ir tik populārs?
 - Jānis Reirs: "Konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs..."

Dzīvotāju jaunā totalitārisma

Latvijas Tieslietu ministri un citi politiķi, kas ir atbalstījuši konvencijas ratifikāciju, ir kļuvuši par "totalitārisma" simbolu. Šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs...

Nacionāli cīņu pret Stambulas konvenciju zaudē

Latvijas Tieslietu ministri un citi politiķi, kas ir atbalstījuši konvencijas ratifikāciju, ir kļuvuši par "totalitārisma" simbolu. Šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs...

Pa plānu Stambulas ledu

Latvijas Tieslietu ministri un citi politiķi, kas ir atbalstījuši konvencijas ratifikāciju, ir kļuvuši par "totalitārisma" simbolu. Šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs...

«Pareizās» ideoloģijas gludeklis

Latvijas Tieslietu ministri un citi politiķi, kas ir atbalstījuši konvencijas ratifikāciju, ir kļuvuši par "totalitārisma" simbolu. Šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs...

Sabiedrības daļa ir tie, kuri vēlas dzīvot objektīvu, nevis vienos vārtos sadzītas pildbumbas

Latvijas Tieslietu ministri un citi politiķi, kas ir atbalstījuši konvencijas ratifikāciju, ir kļuvuši par "totalitārisma" simbolu. Šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs...

Saeima, balsojot par konvencijas ratifikāciju, deputātam būs jārēķinās ar savu vēlētāju

Latvijas Tieslietu ministri un citi politiķi, kas ir atbalstījuši konvencijas ratifikāciju, ir kļuvuši par "totalitārisma" simbolu. Šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs, jo šis konvencijas kritiķis ir populārs...

Figure 1. Eye on the Istanbul Convention discussion

and Myths Live... (IS. n.] 2016a), while on 18 May the Minister of Welfare, Jānis Reirs, signed the Istanbul Convention on behalf of the government (ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the Saeima had not yet taken place in the second half of 2023).

The widespread public debate and backlash against the Istanbul Convention is not unique to Latvia. Similar processes are taking place in other European countries and especially in Eastern Europe (Köttig, Blum 2017, 4). The “war on gender”, as Polish scholar Magdalena Grabowska points out, is therefore not just a local phenomenon (Grabowska 2015, 64).

Gender studies researcher Elżbieta Korolczuk stresses that the “war on gender” needs to be interpreted as a specific stage in a long-term process, not as a disconnected new phenomenon. She proposes to rethink the notion of “backlash”. The revised notion of “backlash” could be used as an explanatory framework for the backlash against gender equality initiatives, especially in post-Soviet societies (Korolczuk 2015, 44). In the view of “traditional values” (tradition over equality) advocates, gender equality is interpreted as an ideology in which socially constructed gender is lumped together with biological sex, and in which the proponents of gender equality argue for the right to abortion and same-sex marriage – thus preaching an “ideology of death”. The advocates of “traditional values” include the idea of the family, which is made up of homosexual couples, in the concept of “gender” (Juhász 2015, 29).

The negative reaction of “traditional values” advocates to the Istanbul Convention can be largely explained by the fact that the Convention defines gender (the Latvian translation of the Convention uses the term “social gender”) as a socially constructed category. Thus, the supporters of traditional values claim that the Istanbul Convention promotes a “gender ideology”. According to the interpretation of opponents, “gender ideology” is also understood in the hypersexualised culture of liberal capitalism, while sex education, such as health education, promotes paedophilia within the framework of these views. Marxism, feminism, and queer theories are pointed to as the basis of “gender ideology” (Maďarová 2015, 39). The link between feminism, queer theory, and Marxism, or even fascism and Nazism, is a popular technique of “defenders of traditional values”. Marxism, Nazism and now feminism are positioned as a new form of totalitarianism (Maďarová 2015, 40).

The mass media have contributed to spreading the myth of “gender ideology”. The media, at the beginning of the Istanbul Convention debate, provided a surprisingly uneven coverage of gender equality issues, which often favoured populist traditionalism over gender equality and LGBTI rights. For example, the idea that “gender ideology” was anti-family, pro-homosexuality and anti-life, spread much faster in Hungarian public discourse than the information about the nature of gender equality (Juhász 2015, 28). The role of the mass media is crucial for shaping public opinion and awareness, knowledge about the nature of gender, gender equality, as well as regarding specific gender equality initiatives, such as the Istanbul Convention.

Methodology

Linguist Ruth Wodak uses historical discourse analysis as a method of analysis when studying right-wing populist texts. The historical discourse analysis is based on the five discursive strategies found in ideological messages: naming, asserting, arguing, perspectivization, reinforcing/reducing, defining, and explaining (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, 93–94). Wodak’s analysis of *right-wing* populist texts uses two discursive strategies – naming (how events/objects/people are labelled), and arguing (what properties are attributed to events/objects/people) (Wodak 2015, 50–51).

Results

The dynamics of the discussion of the topic in the newspapers considered differ. The most materials of different genres have been published in the newspaper “*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*” – 21 publications, “*Lauku Avīze*” – 5 publications, while the newspapers “*Diena*” and “*Vesti segodnya*” have published significantly fewer materials, 3 and 2 articles respectively. It is the newspaper “*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*” that has maintained the most extensive discussion of the Istanbul Convention. It should be noted that the newspapers published a small number of analytical articles on the topic, dominated by news and opinion pieces: 12 commentaries, 3 analytical articles, 8 news pieces, 6 interviews, 2 discussions. Analysing the material, several discourses can be identified: Conspiracy scenarios; Threats to the traditional world view; The phantom of the Soviets.

1. Conspiracy scenarios

One of the strategies Wodak identifies in the rhetoric of the far-right is the construction of threat scenarios – “they” are threatening us. They are different and conspiring against us. Conspiracies are part of the discursive tactics to create fear. The far-right (*right-wing*) upholds traditional conservative values and morals (family values, traditional gender roles) and wants to maintain the *status quo* (Wodak 2015, 50–51). Conspiracies often require dramatized and exaggerated, unrealistic scenarios in which perpetrators set the order of things (Wodak 2015, 67–69).

The discursive strategies of assertion and argumentation are used to construct the discourse of conspiracy scenarios. In the discourse of conspiracy scenarios, the feminism proponents and the advocates of gender equality are pointed out as perpetrators. The discourse creates a conspiracy theory that “evil forces” – feminists, gender studies scholars – have conspired to change people’s gender. This discourse uses the discursive strategy of argumentation to draw false conclusions about the nature of gender or social sex. In these arguments, biological sex is conflated with socially constructed gender, thereby inferring that people will be “free to choose” their gender, or that an external force – the aforementioned

evil forces – may do so (Veidemane 2016c; Veidemane 2016e; [S. n.] 2016a). The discursive strategy of assertion has also been used to construct a discourse of conspiracy. Comparisons that emphasise the evil nature of conspiracies, the hidden intentions of the conspirators are used. The Istanbul Convention is even compared to the intentions of Satan (Veidemane 2016e).

To sum up, the discourse of conspiracy creates fear of a threat to traditional values, to the world order. This threat includes the nature-defying forms of gender, catering to the whims of sexual choice. The discourse of conspiracy points to the evil forces behind such changes. Changes in society's views on gender roles do not arise spontaneously but are brought about by evil intentions.

2. A threat to the traditional world view

This discourse is expressed in the positioning of the threat to traditional gender roles as a threat to the national idea, national culture, traditions, and everything “natural”. As Wodak points out, this discourse is expressed in the rhetoric of the far right. The far-right (*right-wing*) defends the heteronormative family, thus emphasising family values (Wodak 2015, 174).

Newspaper publications make claims about the possible consequences of the Istanbul Convention for Latvian society. The binary opposition “natural versus artificial” is used as an argument for such an impact, where the “natural” denotes the traditional gender roles, whereas the “artificial” is used to designate the very concept of “social gender” which is employed in the Istanbul Convention (Veidemane 2016d; Veidemane 2016b). In the Convention, references to the socially constructed nature of gender are interpreted not as the result of naturally occurring discursive agreements in society, but as a conscious and deliberate activity (Veidemane 2016e).

Another strategy used in the discourse of the threat to the traditional world-view is to point out the Istanbul Convention's ostensible goal of eliminating gender (actually referring to the biological sex, not gender) differences. A frightening future scenario is constructed, in which same-sex beings rule the world (Veidemane 2016b; Veidemane 2016c; Latkovskis 2016). Employing the discursive strategy of argumentation, it is falsely concluded that the Istanbul Convention has a competence and influence to bring about such a fundamental change in society – to equalise the biological sex of humans ([S. n.] 2016b). The reader is presented with distorted and misleading information, both by attributing to the Istanbul Convention a legal force that such a legal instrument does not possess, and by referring to topics that the Convention does not touch upon.

3. The “Phantom of the Soviets”

This discourse uses various discursive strategies to construct fear by linking the Soviet experience with the Istanbul Convention. By creating fear,

the communicator constructs an image of danger, something that the receiver of the communication should fear (Mađarová 2015, 37). Within this discourse, several strategies can be distinguished that construct fear through various degrees of reference to totalitarianism and the Soviet past, ranging from indirect references and allusions to direct comparisons with totalitarianism and Stalinism. The first level of fear construction emphasises the coercive and imposed nature of the “genderist ideology” with which the Istanbul Convention is equated. The discursive strategy of naming contributes to constructing (in a discursive manner) the convention as an inevitable and imposed, consequently – an unwanted phenomenon. For example, “The Convention envisages the imposition of “social sex” or “gender” on states” (Veidemane 2016c) and “The notorious Istanbul Convention, which will be a brazen imposition of genderist ideology on Latvia” (Veidemane 2016a). Discursive links are made with the Soviet past and communism as an unwanted but imposed ideology.

The discursive strategy of affirmation is used to explicitly link convention and the fears of the Soviet past. Ensuring that Latvian legislation complies with the Convention is compared to totalitarianism (Veidemane 2016b). Using erroneous conclusions about gender (it should be stressed that gender is in its essence a term, not an ideology or social movement), it is equated with Marxist ideology and the implementation of Marxism in practice, or the Soviet system.

Conclusions

The discourses analysed in the current study confirm the entrenchment of “anti-gender” views in Latvian public. They are also in line with the rhetoric of the far-right (*right-wing*) as defined by Wodak. The discourses constructed in the media use many unfounded, absurd statements, making unfounded and misleading judgements, the main goal of which is to discredit both the Istanbul Convention and the idea of gender equality in general. The aim of the convention, the fight against domestic violence, is not mentioned in the discourses. The publications remain silent about the real aim of the Convention – countering violence against women and domestic violence. In 2023, it can be argued that the Istanbul Convention has highly polarised the society. Various political forces, public actors, have used this issue to increase their popularity, deliberately spreading lies, distorting information and increasing hatred, purposefully politicising it in order to build their political capital. Unfortunately, the disinformation campaign against the Istanbul Convention has negatively coloured the idea of gender equality and the respective initiatives in general. It is likely that, following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, gender equality initiatives will be similarly utilised for building political capital.

Author's note: This research is funded by the Latvian Council of Science, project “Jeopardizing Democracy Through Disinformation and Conspiracies: Reconsidering Experience of Latvia”, project No. lzp-2019/1-0278

REFERENCES

- Grabowska, M. (2015). Culture War or Business as Usual? Recent Instances and the Historical Origins of the Backlash Against Women's Rights and Sexual Rights in Poland. In: Heinrich Böll Foundation (ed.). *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe. Publication Series on Democracy*, Vol. 38, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, pp. 54–65.
- Juhász, B. (2015). Forwards or Backwards? Strategies to Overcome Gender Backlash in Hungary. In: Heinrich Böll Foundation (ed.). *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe. Publication Series on Democracy*, Vol. 38, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, pp. 28–33.
- Korolczuk, E. (2015). “The War on Gender” from a Transnational Perspective – Lessons for Feminist Strategising. In: Heinrich Böll Foundation (ed.). *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe. Publication Series on Democracy*, Vol. 38, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, pp. 43–54.
- Köttig, M., Blum, A. (2017). Introduction. In: Köttig, M., Bitzan, R., Petö, A. (eds). *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–10.
- Latkovskis, B. (2016). Pa plānu Stambulas ledu [On the Thin Ice of Istanbul]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 13–15 May, p. 7.
- Maďarová, Z. (2015). Love and Fear. Argumentative Strategies Against Gender Equality in Slovakia. In: Heinrich Böll Foundation (ed.). *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe. Publication Series on Democracy*, Vol. 38, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, pp. 33–43.
- Reisigl, M., Wodak, R. (2009). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). In: Wodak, R., Meyer, M. (eds). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 87–121.
- [S. n.]. (2016a). Diskusija: Stambulas konvencija nebūs panaceja. Bažas un mīti dzīvi [The Istanbul Convention will not be a Panacea. Concerns and Myths Alive]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 16 Feb., pp. 6–7.
- [S. n.]. (2016b). Strasti po konventsii [Passions Concerning Convention]. *Vesti segodnya*, 11 May, p. 4.
- Veidemane, E. (2016a). Līdzenu mums ceļu, biedri! [Make Way, Comrades!]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 23 Feb., p. 6.
- Veidemane, E. (2016b). Dzīvojam jaunā totalitārisma [Living in a New Totalitarianism]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 29 Apr., p. 6.
- Veidemane, E. (2016c). Kad neviens nevienu nesītis [When No One Will Hit Anyone]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 11 May, p. 2.
- Veidemane, E. (2016d). “Pareizās” ideoloģijas gludeklis [The Iron of the “Right” Ideology]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 20–22 May, p. 7.

MARITA ZITMANE. How It All Started. Discussion of Istanbul Convention in Latvian Daily ..

Veidmane, E. (2016e). Konvencijas āža kājas – arvien uzskatāmākas [The Legs of the Convention Goat – Increasingly Visible]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 25 May, pp. 6–7.

Wodak, R. (2015). *The Politics of Fear. What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage.