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Science Communication Practices in the Fundamental and Applied Research Programme of Latvian Council of Science in 2023

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Abstract. Science communication plays a crucial role in attracting public money for science, promote scientific careers and shaping policy accordingly. Very few studies have been particularly dedicated to the ways how Latvian scientists communicate their research to public audiences. The current study will attempt to fill this gap and offer analysis of scientists' perception of communication and the models they choose to communicate effectively. One must take into consideration the claim of many scholars that definition of science communication remains elusive and multifaceted, often described as vague and fuzzy. This forestalls a clear understanding of what results are expected and how are they to be achieved. At this point, science communication models are of great help to guide and measure expected results. Although the models are usually presented as an evolutionary form, in real life situations they often transpire as a mix and cannot be identified straightforwardly. However, they are usually declared in forms that are separated not only according to the way activities are carried out but also according to the evolutionary forms of transfer. Meanwhile, as evolution implies, there is a need to be ready for change, hence, it is pivotal for society, as well as scientists. This study encompasses projects ($n = 47$) funded by Latvian Council of Science in 2020, whose implementers have submitted their final reports in 2023. Qualitative content analysis has revealed that the focus of project proposals and reports lies in the Deficit model of science communication, often leaving behind Dialogue and Participatory models. This paper aims to explore the nuanced definitions of science communication and contribute the analysis of the progression of its models in relation to societal and scientific readiness. By examining these models, we can gain insights into how science communication practices have adapted to meet the changing expectations and needs of both society and the scientific community.

Keywords: science communication, Fundamental and Applied Research programme (FARP) project proposals, qualitative analysis, thematic analysis, models of science communication

Introduction

As claimed by many scholars, in recent years, science communication has gained greater attention (Volk 2024; Nerghes *et al.* 2022; Trench *et al.* 2020). It could be due to different reasons, use of public money and putting science on the political and social agenda (Fecher *et al.* 2021; Fu *et al.* 2016), attracting young people to choosing their career and remaining in science, being open and transparent to society, gaining new knowledge from and about lay public (Metcalfe 2019), increasing trust in science and scientists (Weingart, Joubert 2019), and many more. Although the need for science communication is pivoting, the term itself, as stated by numerous scholars, is still perceived as vague and "fuzzy" (Faehnrich 2021; Metcalfe 2022). Burns *et al.* (2023, 183) state that "science communication [...] is defined as the use of appropriate skills, media, activities, and dialogue to produce one or more of the following personal responses to science (the AEIOU vowel analogy): Awareness, Enjoyment, Interest, Opinion-forming, and Understanding." Meanwhile, Bucchi and Trench (2021, 1) tried to sum up all the possible varieties of science communication terms and provided broad and yet compact definition, limiting it to "the social conversation around science." For the sake of shaping the focus of this research paper, **I would like to define science communication as a way of incorporating all science engagement activities referring to scientists that are communicating by any means and targeting different audiences**. Overall, the theoretical science communication models are used in order to describe the relationships between scientists and the public.

Science communication models

As stated by Metcalfe, theoretical perspectives of science communication were initially driven by practice, which, in turn, influenced practice and further science communication scholarship (Metcalfe 2022). Probably, this is the reason and necessity to embed the practice into a theoretical framework that is done by using models to describe science communication. Historically, since 1980, many authors claimed that focus of science communication should be on "scientific literacy", or as suggested by many, "public understanding of science" (Gross 1994), however, it is usually perceived that lay audiences know too little, whilst scientists know too much to translate it into culture, the common language of lay audience. Other studies revealed that "public understanding of science is useful for certain well-defined analytical purposes" (Durant *et al.* 1992, 161) that definitely could be of use for certain scientific disciplines. The shift from the Deficit model emerged in ten years, approximately in 1990 (Wynne 2006), when the two-way communication – the Dialogue model – was adopted for the purpose to make science more "democratic" and increase public trust in scientists. It seemed to provide a possibility to discuss and make scientists more approachable by the public, however, it also posed different questions about their willingness and capacity to conduct this dialogue effectively, not to mention hearing different opinions not supported by data as an argument. These challenges are still pertinent, they hold especially true when discussions occur as to what extent the Dialogue model differs from the Deficit model (Nerghes *et al.* 2022). In the last years, the Participatory model was introduced, where public engagement holds an even greater significance than just posing questions or arguing and questioning scientific endeavours. Gross (1994, 4) states: "To understand that rhetoric is situational is also to understand that only in the special circumstances of scientific and scholarly exchange, and perhaps not even then, can unaided reason hope to prevail upon a public. It is because of this that Aristotle speaks of "the available means of persuasion, means that may originate in the mind (or in the heart), or in the reason (or in emotions and values). Rhetorically speaking, the *sine qua non* of this process is trust. Because the public must trust those who are trying to persuade them, central to all situated utterances is a speaker in whose virtue will and good sense the public has confidence." There is a necessity to create a trustful relationship between science and society, and one of the signs of acknowledging it has been the practice of public engagement. This has become the main focus and obligation since citizen science initiatives are supported by funding authorities. The biggest funding programme for Research and Innovation funded by European Commission (93.5 billion euro) has specifically targeted public, introducing in every consortia-type project the obligation of Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation of Scientific Results work package, allocating it a substantial part of the project budget (European Commission 2024). It encourages scientists to seek new solutions and communication styles, posing even more questions for them to answer, e.g. how ready are they or what possibilities and tools do they have not only to comply with the criteria but also to effectively measure the outputs and outcomes of the different activities envisaged in the project. Furthermore, despite the fact that there are digital tools and resources that boost implementation of different practices and testing of new approaches, the Deficit model of communication is still prevalent (Nerghes *et al.* 2022).

Planning and implementation of activities connected with Participatory model is a challenge. It is not only two-way communication – this is co-creation of knowledge, a process that requires additional effort and competences from scientists. As Smallman *et al.* (2020, 946) stated in their study, the participatory turn appears to be gathering strength. In 2011, the European Commission's concept of responsible research and innovation "developed and adopted a concept of RRI [Responsible Research and Innovation] that built upon the earlier ideas around public participation and dialogue, but with the aim of involving all actors (not just citizens or experts) throughout the process of innovation such that science could be more firmly rooted in society and society's needs and ambitions [...]. This heralded a move from 'science in society' to 'science with and for society'." However, some scientific fields are more open and flexible, while others have greater difficulties, as usually there is a focus on science and technology, where humanities, social sciences and art are as if omitted. That is probably the question of terminology, but still – research is the usual term that encompasses social sciences and humanities, whereas science usually is used to denote STEM disciplines. Meanwhile, in recent years there is a shift of using STEAM definition that includes humanities and arts. Although the usual practices for different disciplines vary, there are "historical" or "traditional" approaches to communication and choice of practices and tools (Metcalfe 2019).

Fundamental and Applied Research Projects (FLPP) is a science funding programme financed by the Republic of Latvia Ministry of Education and Science and implemented by the Latvian Council of Science, one of the most important for the Latvian scientific community. Its aim is advancement of the existing knowledge and technological insights in all fields of science – natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, agriculture, forestry and veterinary sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts. It supports the most outstanding ideas of Latvian scientists and ensures the balanced development of all scientific disciplines. The situation with the projects approved for implementation in 2020 was more challenging. Funding rate per project is up to 300 000 euro (with up to 5% that could be allocated to administrative costs, including communication) and the project duration is up to 3 years. However, the project implementation and planned activities were influenced by COVID-19 outbreak. Analysing project results, it is significant to take into consideration these circumstances, and the reaction to that, since the second call for individual proposals was announced in the same year to allocate emergency funds for research of COVID-19 mitigation measures. Latvian Council of Science as a funding organization keeps all the records about reported communication activities, however, reports are usually focused on numbers and concentrate less on effectiveness. In order for scientists to be effective in their outreach activities, it is valuable not only to monitor but also evaluate the effectiveness of science communication. Such information could be of help for scientists when presented in a coherent and ready to use materials providing insights of good practices and tools that they could use with measurable effect. This goal could be achieved by understanding the state-of-art status of science communication at the moment.

Public financing of science projects in Latvia is reflecting the tendencies of EU, and in FARP projects scientists that want to apply for funding are required to describe their communication plan in applications and reports. For this purpose, the applicants have to complete two sections in their application form – point

2.2. The socioeconomic impact and public availability of the results, and the report section "Socio-economic impact of results", which contains tables which applicants fill in according to channel, activity performed, target group and availability for links or sources, as well as period when the activity was performed. The report contains a special subsection that focuses on publicity and communication, where implementers can describe and report any relevant information about the communication activities in their project.

With the help of such models as formulated by Brossard and Lewenstein (2009), it is possible to understand "what the "problem" is, how to measure the problem, and how to address the problem", the "problem" being the public's understanding of, and relationship with science.

Research questions

In order to describe the relationships that exist between scientists and society in Latvia, this research paper addresses three questions:

- RQ1: What science communication model is usually chosen?
- RQ2: Are there differences in choosing science communication models in different scientific fields?
- RQ3: What are the barriers to effective science communication in lzp-2020/1-financed projects?

The results of this study are based on the qualitative content analysis of documents, including proposals and reports that were submitted to the Latvian Council of Science by the funded project teams ($N = 47$) under the call FARP lzp-2020/1.

Methods

Even taking into consideration the allocated budget, as well as declared goals and objectives, in ensuring information about the significance and contemporary practices of citizen engagement, it is important to establish whether the shift from Deficit to Participatory model has occurred in reality and is adopted by the funded projects. The practices of supported projects across all the funded disciplines according to science communication models were never in the spotlight of a research paper. In order to fill this gap, I have built upon the work of Metcalfe (Metcalfe 2019) that, based on extensive literature review, created a list of objectives of science communication models. Although some researchers have recently been focusing on the science communication topic (Bulderberga 2024; Adamsone-Fiskoviča 2014), there is absence of monitoring of the existing practices in respect of science communication models for all the funded projects. This study provides a snapshot in time that can point the way to similar future studies, and establish a point for later comparison.

The data for the analysis was received from the Latvian Council of Science in an anonymized form, providing project proposals' section 2.2. "Socio-economic impact and publicity of the results", and the report for the same section with description and tables concerning the performed activities. Number of projects was (N = 47), documents were separately arranged according to five disciplines: Life Sciences (projects N = 23); Humanities and Arts (N = 5); Agriculture (N = 5); Medicine and Health Sciences (N = 8); and Social Sciences (N = 6). Coding was performed using *MXQDA Analytics Pro* (version 24.4.1.).

I coded the qualitative data using content analysis (Cho *et al.* 2014), and applied a deductive approach to analyse responses against the objectives identified in the literature and edited by Metcalfe in her study (Metcalfe 2019), as outlined in the previous section.

Due to the prevalence of financed projects in Life Sciences, there were more activities declared and thus this discipline had more codes and variations of reported practices, as there were 23 projects. Figure 1 provides an overview of the application of various science communication models – Participatory, Dialogue, and Deficit – across disciplines of the projects: Life Sciences, Humanities and Arts, Agriculture, Medicine and Health Sciences, and Social Sciences. The figure showcases both the inter-discipline usage and the prevalence of each model within these disciplines. The Participatory model emphasizes collaborative engagement between scientists and the public or other stakeholders. The data indicate varying levels of adoption across disciplines; this model is employed most prominently in Life Sciences (30%), followed by Agriculture (27%) and Medicine and Health Sciences (25%). Humanities and Arts (16%) and Social Sciences (15%) demonstrate lower usage. When comparing the Participatory model to others within disciplines, it appears less frequently overall, with the highest adoption in Agriculture (14%) and Life Sciences (13%). Notably, usage drops in Social Sciences (8%), Humanities and Arts (7%), and Medicine and Health Sciences (4%).

The Dialogue model fosters two-way communication between scientists and the public, emphasizing mutual learning and understanding; it is most utilized within Life Sciences (37%), with Social Sciences (35%) and Medicine and Health Sciences (20%) also showing significant application. The Humanities and Arts (14%) and Agriculture (6%) disciplines apply this model to a lesser extent. However, among other models, the Dialogue model has a strong prevalence in the Life Sciences and Medicine and Health Sciences, with usage rates of 81% and 42%, respectively. Other disciplines, including Humanities and Arts (15%), Agriculture (12%), and Social Sciences (12%), exhibit lower adoption rates.

The Deficit model, which assumes a one-way flow of information from experts to the public, remains prevalent across all disciplines. There is a significant reliance on the Deficit model within Life Sciences (81%), with Social

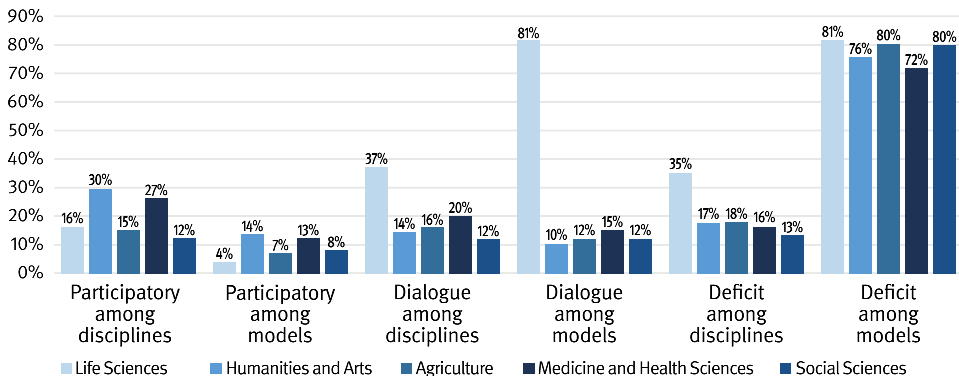

Figure 1. Overview of the use of models in projects

Sciences (74%) and Medicine and Health Sciences (48%) also showing considerable use. Agriculture (43%) and Humanities and Arts (17%) apply this model less frequently. The Deficit model is overwhelmingly dominant among disciplines as well, with near-universal application across disciplines: Humanities and Arts (80%), Agriculture (80%), Social Sciences (80%), Life Sciences (81%), and Medicine and Health Sciences (76%).

This figure highlights the entrenched use of the Deficit model across various academic disciplines, suggesting a traditional preference for one-way communication strategies in science communication. However, the Participatory and Dialogue models show varying levels of adoption, indicating a shift towards more interactive and inclusive communication practices, particularly in disciplines such as Life Sciences and Medicine and Health Sciences. The lower adoption rates in Humanities and Arts and Agriculture suggest potential areas for growth in integrating more participatory and dialogic approaches to enhance public engagement in these fields.

Overall, this analysis underscores the diversity in the application of science communication models, reflecting the nuanced needs and goals, as well as approaches used by different academic disciplines in their outreach and engagement efforts.

Grounded theory implies constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling. Constant comparative analysis entails an iterative process of concurrent data collection and analysis, which involves “the systematic choice and study of several comparison groups”, whereas in case of qualitative data analysis a researcher who uses qualitative content analysis aims to “systematically describe the meaning” of materials in a certain respect that the researcher has specified from research questions. Although both grounded theory and qualitative content analysis follow coding processes, content analysis does not focus on finding relationships among categories or theory building; instead, it focuses on extracting categories from the data (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries 2023). As stated in the literature, qualitative content analysis can be referred to as "a research method for subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Even 2023).

The codes were allocated accordingly to the objectives that Metcalfe systematized in her study and examples of the quotes for the text are given in the Code System Handbook developed with the help of *MAXQDA* (Table 1).

After coding all five documents, it was clear that Deficit model was prevalent in the analysed documents for all the disciplines, however, regarding specific objectives, it was observed that each model had more priority objectives than the others. The objectives were allocated accordingly with the frequency of codes for each of them (Table 2).

Table 1. The coding scheme of the objectives identified in the documents (an example)

Code System	Explanation	Frequency	Examples
Code System		1164	
Participatory model			
26 To shape the agenda of science	Shape the scientific research agenda (Bucchi 2008; Palmer, Schibeci 2012).	16	Development of policy documents, guidelines content, informative material content Medicine and health sciences: 168–168 (0)
24 To participate in democratic policymaking	Participate with various public in policymaking, and integrate their views (Brossard, Lewenstein, 2009; Höppner 2009; Palmer, Schibeci 2012; Trench, Junker 2001). Engage citizens more democratically in science and technology issues, including making decisions and formulating policy (Kurath, Gisler 2009; Palmer, Schibeci 2012; Scheufele 2014; Stocklmayer 2012).	58	Conference is intended as a platform to strengthen further collaboration with relevant national stakeholders in policy, clinical and scientific fields, as well as an outlet to raise public awareness of project results and topic in general. Medicine and health sciences: 96–96 (0)

Table 2. Three most frequently used codes for each science communication model applied in FARP projects lzp-2020/1

Deficit model	Codes	Dialogue model	Codes	Participatory model	Codes
2 To transfer information	352	15 To be or to make science/scientists more accessible	84	24 To participate in democratic policymaking	58
7 To promote science as a career	248	20 To make connections between people, including between disciplines	66	26 To shape the agenda of science	16
8 To inspire, build excitement, generate interest in science	82	19 To help people to make decisions	2	23 To participate with other interests to influence the culture of science in society	10

Table 3. Reliability analysis of science communication objectives

No	Item	Mean scale w/o item	Std. dev. scale w/o item	Corrected item-scale correlation	Alpha w/o item
1	Coded Segments	183.60	78.53	0.98	0.64
2	To transfer information	346.00	143.79	0.71	0.58
3	To promote science as a career	366.80	141.89	0.75	0.57
4	To inspire, build excitement, generate interest in science	400.00	161.71	0.90	0.65
5	To be or to make science/scientists more accessible	399.60	162.96	0.83	0.66
6	To make connections between people, including between different disciplines	403.20	161.82	0.67	0.65
7	To help people to make decisions	416.00	169.73	−0.35	0.69
8	To participate in democratic policymaking	404.80	170.77	−0.45	0.70
9	To shape the agenda of science	413.20	168.22	0.73	0.68
10	To participate with other interests to influence the culture of science	414.40	169.98	−0.12	0.69

Hence, as *MAXQDA* software enables conducting a statistical analysis, it was done for the respective aforementioned objectives. Table 3 presents a reliability analysis of various objectives associated with science communication. The analysis includes the mean and standard deviation of the scale if each item were removed, the corrected item-scale correlation, and Cronbach's alpha without each item. This comprehensive analysis helps in evaluating the internal consistency and reliability of the items as part of a broader measurement scale.

The items listed in the table represent different objectives of science communication models, ranging from information transfer and career promotion to public engagement and policy participation.

Each item is evaluated based on how its removal would impact the overall scale's mean and standard deviation, providing insights into its relative importance and consistency within the scale. The metrics of Corrected Item-Scale correlation measures the correlation between individual item and the total score of the remaining items, e.g. as the "To be or to make science/scientists more accessible" (0.83) and "To inspire, build excitement, generate interest in science" (0.90) show high consistency, there are found items with negative or low correlation such as "To help people to make decisions" (−0.35) and "To participate in democratic policymaking" (−0.45), indicate potential issues with consistency and may not align well with the other items. That could be a result of low number of codes or insufficient information provided in the reports.

The column "Cronbach's Alpha Without Item" presents the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale if the specific item were removed. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency or reliability, e.g. removing "Coded Segments" would result in a slightly lower alpha (0.64), while removing items with lower corrected correlations, such as "To participate in democratic policymaking", would slightly increase the alpha (0.70).

It is suggested that most items have acceptable to highly corrected item-scale correlations, indicating that they contribute positively to the overall consistency of the scale. However, a few items, particularly those with negative correlations, may require further examination to understand their alignment with the other goals and their impact on the overall measurement scale.

This reliability analysis provides valuable insights into the consistency and alignment of various science communication goals. The results highlight the strengths and potential weaknesses within the scale, guiding future refinements to enhance the robustness and reliability of the measurement tool. Further investigation into items with negative correlations may help in optimizing the scale for more accurate and effective assessment of science communication objectives.

By using the visual tool of models that are prevalent across the documents and presented disciplines, it is observed that the Deficit model is dominant in every field of science. The most objective used in coding was "To transfer the information", that involved such explanations, as "information to other scientists", "informing policy makers", and the most used was "information available on web page of the project and social media". Although in Table 3 for project reports the main activities included social media and web pages, it is not clear how effectively it contributes to the information transfer, as the presence there is not measured and evaluated. According to the Oxford Dictionary stating that

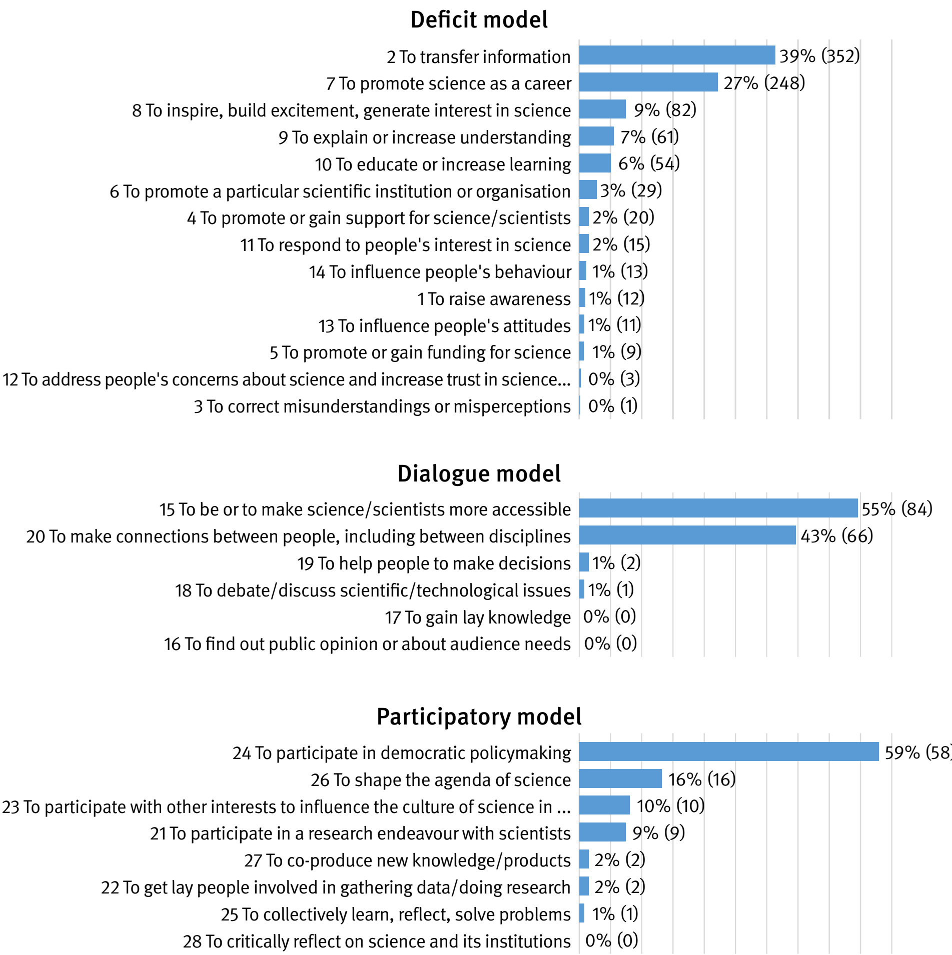

Figure 2. Representation of each model separately in projects

“a barrier is a problem, rule or situation that prevents somebody from doing something, or that makes something impossible”, it is important to evaluate how effective the information was and whether it reached the expected outcomes (Schäfer 2009).

Results

As the project documentation was anonymized, it posed definite limitations, since it was not possible to take into consideration demographic factor and analyse it from the perspective of who was responsible for the project and how many different stage researchers or fields of science were involved in the project implementation and thus contributed to implementation of the project and especially “Impact” part, where all the communication, dissemination and exploitation results were presented.

I further elaborate on the implications of this finding in in the section “Discussion” below.

Likewise, I will provide considerations regarding the general science communication goals, and how these goals align with the three science communication models discussed in the introduction of this paper, namely, the Deficit, Dialogue, and Participation model.

Discussion

Models of science communication are not linear; they frequently coexist in project proposals and reports. Using various models in communication is important, since it enriches the practices and ways of delivery of scientific knowledge to the public. There should not be one-way communication only, or, as Priscilla Van Even formulated it, “public science dissemination” (Van Even 2023, I). Notably, the use of those methods and practices are not coherent, improper balance of practices, lack of knowledge as to what science communication actually is and what and how it should be done, planning activities with target audience and its expectations are usually the barriers that hinder effective implementation of science communication models.

There are definite practices that are “traditional” and characteristic to some disciplines, e.g. in Medical Sciences, the Participatory model, in the objective 24 “To participate in democratic policymaking”, in comparison to other disciplines, is used more often. Clear statement of target audience as policy makers, entrepreneurs or industry representatives is better outlined and targeted by communication activities than in case of addressing society at large. However, the event “Researcher’s Night” is referred to as an example with a broad coverage of objectives, to this one could attribute such objectives of the Deficit model as 2 “To transfer the information”, 4 “To promote or gain support for science/scientists”, 6 “To promote a particular scientific institution or organisation”, 7 “To promote science as a career”, 8 “To inspire, build excitement, generate interest in science”, 9 “To explain or increase understanding”, 10 “To educate or increase learning”, and Dialogue model – 15 “To be or to make science/scientists more accessible”. The second event that is usually reported in the context of communication is festival “Lampa”, where the actual discussions with scientists occur.

Only in Medical Sciences in one instance it was clearly stated that Deficit model was used – 3 “To correct misunderstandings or misperceptions”, other projects did not take into consideration lay people’s knowledge, likewise, there were no declared activities in Dialogue model as to 16 “To find out public opinion or about audience needs” or 17 “To gain lay knowledge”. However, this knowledge and approaches are of crucial importance, as the information that is provided by the project or aim of communication practices could be irrelevant to the audience's needs or understanding of the current situation in the field. Many scholars have claimed that the Deficit model approach is "unsuccessful and empirically faulty", it is highly focused on the content that researchers are translating to the lay audience, based on the researchers' assumption of what this audience does not know, following the concept of "Public Understanding of Science" (Bucchi 2016). Meanwhile, it is not clear how it could be properly addressed if there are no previous studies or analysis defining lay people's knowledge about the particular subject that is planned to be communicated. It was supposed that this gap could be addressed by introducing the Dialogue model. However, Trench has critically reflected on Dialogue model, as it is supposed to bring more to discussion between science and public and to a certain extent these expectations have been met, which also is further stimulated by digital transformation and digital media use by scientists. However, Trench primarily argues as to whether it has had a real impact on shifting science communication practices (Trench 2008).

COVID-19 influenced different on-site activities that were reported by some projects. To overcome the limitations imposed by pandemic, online events were introduced, supporting Bucchi's (2016, 265) claim that "Digital media allow, among other things, research institutions and actors to supply to end-users an unprecedented amount and variety of materials, for example, videos, interviews with scientists, selected news items." There is no need to include media or journalists as mediators between scientists and society. It gives opportunities to make contacts directly and increases visibility of scientists, their approachability and, if implemented successfully, establishing connections and trust.

As all of this information is attributed to the "Impact" section of the project, it could be stated that communication practices of most projects are not well-shaped and thus the results are disorganized and sometimes unclear whether these were intended to be achieved. Digital media are of great help for information dissemination purposes, but in case of the analysed projects they are overused. Instead of creating a platform for discussion, they denote the reported activity as being present. Many project reports stated that news on their websites are posted regularly and general audience would be informed in this way about the project and scientific results, however, it was not stated how many users there were and how often they checked on the information, and whether the page of their scientific institution was even usually perceived as a source of reliable information for general public. There is a need for clear distinction between Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation, where communication could focus on any type of activity with the categories to help choose the possible activity and use it effectively while performing communication activities. Notably, only in one project it was clearly stated that for implementation of communication activities they would be cooperating with the communication department of their institution. It is of crucial importance to build public trust in science and research methods, engaging with different types of audiences, and using various models of science communication could be of great help for scientists. Collaboration between scientists and media, policy makers and higher educational institutions' press departments could promote science as an important topic of the everyday agenda. However, there is a necessity to support the scientific community in communication activities' planning, implementing and measuring the effectiveness thereof. Such support measures could address the needs of FARP project applicants or consider additional funding to projects that are focused on science communication, to ensure that these measures could be supported by introduction of data monitoring of scientific content consumption, thus ensuring that scientific content is timely, focused and effectively reaches its target audience.

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Science Communication of Research Laboratories of the University of Latvia in the Field of Physics

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Abstract. Applying science communication models, the activities of scientists in the physics research laboratories at the University of Latvia covering the period from April 2023 to May 2024 were analysed. The author aims to understand how scientists communicate science to the public and through which models this communication occurs. Research methods included analysis of "European Researchers' Night 2023" event, project reports, surveys of scientists regarding their involvement and attitudes towards science communication, and semi-structured interviews with department and laboratory heads. Findings indicate that scientists prefer collaborative science communication efforts involving scientists and communication specialists. The "European Researchers' Night" is the most favoured platform for public engagement. However, barriers such as time constraints, lack of knowledge, insufficient financial resources, and limited specialist support contribute to scientists' minimal or passive participation in science communication activities.

Keywords: science communication, communication models, University of Latvia, physicists, European Researchers' Night

Introduction

Science communication serves multiple purposes, but its primary goal is to foster an informed society that appreciates the value of science and its contributions to human knowledge, health, and well-being, while also being capable of engaging constructively in debates and decision-making on science and technology issues. By design, science communication encompasses any event or activity where scientific ideas, methods, knowledge, and research results are shared in a clear and accessible manner with audiences who are not experts in the field. These audiences do not need to possess prior knowledge of the institution's focus or science and technology in general. Since there are no strict guidelines on how science communication should be carried out, institutions and scientists are free to choose their preferred methods of engagement.

Communicating science to non-specialist audiences is an essential aspect of scientific work. It is often a mandatory component of projects funded by organizations like the European Union and the Latvian Council of Science. Knowledge and technology transfer is also vital for society, as entrepreneurs and other users can leverage scientific findings to create high-value innovative products and services. While understanding the target audience and addressing its needs is crucial, effective science communication cannot be achieved without the involvement of scientists themselves, who generate the knowledge and information. However, one challenge lies in the fact that scientists, who are experts in their respective fields (such as physics), are not necessarily communication experts, and science communication may not be a priority in their daily work.

Additionally, there is no standardized approach to evaluating the effectiveness of science communication activities. While the achievements of scientists can often be measured through numerical indicators, such as the number and extent of activities conducted, assessing the quality of science communication remains difficult. This raises an important question: are scientists motivated to engage in high-quality science communication activities, given that the quality of this work is not rigorously assessed and considering the profusion of other tasks that often take precedence in their professional responsibilities? The aim of this study is to analyse the science communication activities of scientists in the physics research laboratories at the University of Latvia. To enable both qualitative and quantitative assessment of these practices, the study focuses on science communication activities conducted over a one-year period, from May 2023 to April 2024. The research addresses several key questions: (1) What motivates scientists to engage in science communication; (2) What models of science communication and communication channels are selected, and what are the reasons behind these choices; (3) Do scientists perceive the outcomes of science communication as important to their work?

Methodology

The methodology for this study was designed to gather information directly from scientists regarding their practices and attitudes, and to compare these insights with the actual activities they performed, thus minimizing subjectivity. The evaluation of science communication activities was guided by established science communication models: Knowledge Deficit model, Dialogue model or Public engagement, and Participation model or Citizen science (Hetland 2014).

To assess these activities, an analysis of the “European Researchers’ Night 2023” programme published by the University of Latvia was conducted. Following the selection of physics-related activities, a total of 39 events were examined. Additionally, anonymous reports on science communication, provided by the Latvian Council of Science within the framework of the Fundamental and Applied Research Programme, were reviewed. After filtering to obtain the projects related to physics and the University of Latvia, 12 projects were included in the analysis. In total, content analysis was performed on 92 science communication activities.

To further explore scientists' attitudes toward science communication, an anonymous online survey was conducted, gathering responses from 56 scientists at the University of Latvia engaged in physics research. Additional qualitative data were collected through five in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior scientists – individuals holding doctoral degrees in physics or engineering – who had held current or past leadership roles at the project, group, department, or laboratory level. These senior scientists were chosen due to their responsibilities for coordinating and overseeing science communication activities according to their job descriptions.

Results

In Latvia, various public events offer scientists opportunities and platforms to engage in science communication activities. Notable examples include national events such as the “European Researchers’ Night” and the “Physics Festival”. Collaboration with journalists also enables the creation of articles or podcasts for specialized publications, further extending the reach of science communication. Additionally, social media platforms, such as *Facebook*, serve as valuable tools for scientists to communicate with the public and share scientific insights.

1. Involvement of University of Latvia physics scientists in the “European Researchers’ Night 2023” event

For all activities, the intended themes were clearly identifiable; however, in some cases, there was difficulty in determining the specific planned activities. It is likely that scientists were not focused on the audience when preparing the descriptions of the activities. The analysis of the event programme based on science communication models revealed the following distribution: the Knowledge Deficit model and the Dialogue model, or a combination of both, were utilized in 75% of the activities. This distribution aligns well with findings reported in the literature, which indicate that the Participation model is employed less frequently compared to other science communication models (Metcalfe 2019).

2. Science communications in projects

The project reports provided information about all the publicity activities, hence, the current research required separating the science communication section. In addition, information was provided about the planned measures, i.e. it was possible to compare the plans and the completed work. According to the information obtained, it can be concluded that the scientists do not distinguish what is science communication or dissemination of results, because the reports gathered all possible information about the activities performed during the project.

Of all the planned science communication activities, three can be singled out that were mentioned most frequently: (1) an article in a popular science magazine or a magazine for a wider audience; (2) a publication on social media (without specifying what exactly is planned to be published) or on the website of the project/institution; and (3) participation in the annual "European Researchers' Night" event. Half of the proposed activities aimed to participate in the "European Researchers' Night" and publish content on the institution's website. The analysis of these activities by using science communication models revealed that the majority, specifically four out of seven (57%), fell under the Knowledge Deficit model. This model was predominantly associated with activities such as publications, articles, and radio segments.

Comparison of the planned activities with those carried out suggests that the original application plans are not being fully followed. While common activities, such as participation in the "European Researchers' Night" event and publishing content on project or institutional websites and social media, are consistently carried out, while more specific activities – like interviews on radio or television – are often not announced in advance but are instead performed on an *ad hoc* basis. This trend may indicate that scientists are reluctant to commit to activities they are not confident in executing. It could also suggest a lack of strategic communication plan during the project preparation phase, leading to a more spontaneous approach to science communication.

An analysis of the science communication activities implemented during the projects revealed that most scientists participated in the "European Researchers' Night" event. However, only half of the projects utilized digital communication channels to share their work. Social media, despite being one of the easiest and most accessible ways to reach a wider audience, was not a popular choice among scientists for communicating their research.

3. The survey of scientists' attitudes towards science communication

The survey included scientists of various levels, ranging from laboratory assistants to leading researchers, and from undergraduate students to doctoral degree holders. The gender distribution among participants was relatively balanced, with a male-to-female ratio of 55% to 45%, in ages from 20 to 80.

More than 80% of survey respondents consider science communication activities to be an important aspect of the research process. Additionally, there is a near-universal agreement (95%) on the need to understand the target audience and adapt materials for each science communication activity. However, fewer than 30% of scientists expressed willingness to organize these activities themselves. A significant reason cited for this reluctance is the substantial amount of working time that science communication activities require, which poses a challenge for many researchers.

According to scientists, the "European Researchers' Night" is considered the most suitable for science communication, which aligns with project report data indicating it as the most frequently implemented activity. In contrast, informational materials on the scientific project's website were viewed as the least suitable for science communication. However, it is important to note that this activity was the most planned according to the project reports. The response to the question of who should carry out science communication was nearly unanimous. In 93% of cases, respondents indicated that science communication should be a collaborative effort between scientists and communication specialists. Meanwhile, 5% felt it should be handled solely by communication specialists, and only one scientist believed that scientists alone should be responsible for this activity. The summary of the science communication activities performed or visited places within the one-year period from May 2023 to April 2024 is presented in Figure 1.

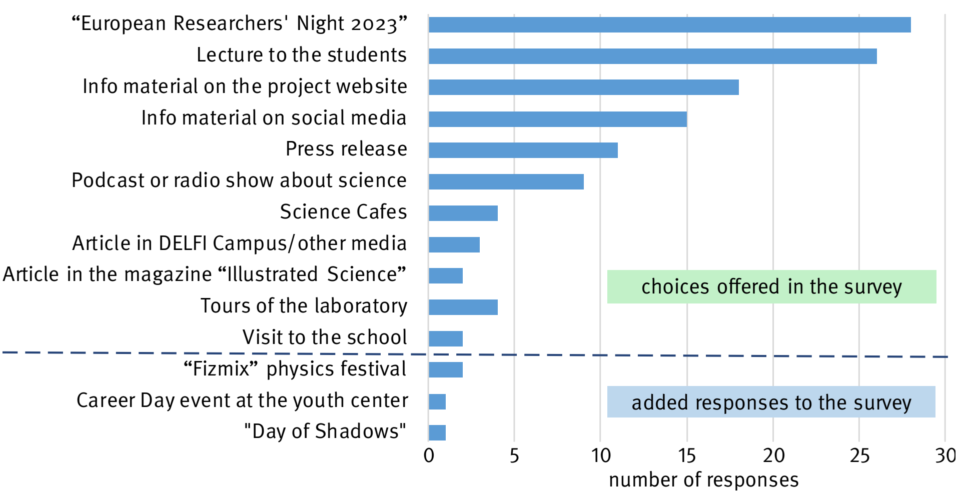

Figure 1. Summary of science communication activities performed, or venues visited between May 2023 and April 2024, based on survey results

All the conducted activities, aside from the "European Researchers' Night", adhered to the Knowledge Deficit or Dialogue models of science communication. For instance, none of the respondents reported involvement in consulting for students' scientific research projects – a type of activity aligned with the Participation model. This discrepancy suggests that scientists may not have a clear understanding of what constitutes science communication and what falls outside its scope. Scientists indicated that, in their opinion, publications on project or institution websites, social networks, and press releases were less suitable for science communication. However, in practice, these channels were used more frequently than more interactive formats like Science Cafés and radio/TV interviews. This preference aligns with the findings reflected in the scientific literature, which suggest that even when researchers recognize the importance of science communication, they often opt for approaches consistent with the Knowledge Deficit or Dialogue models rather than Participation model (Nerghes *et al.* 2022). There is limited evidence in the literature to suggest that theoretical techniques and knowledge about science communication models, as well as best communication practices, are effectively implemented in practice (Judd *et al.* 2021). Several factors contributing to the challenges of science communication have been identified. When summarizing responses to the question about problems and challenges in their working groups, 76% of scientists cited a lack of time as a significant issue, 25% mentioned a lack of interest, and only 10% pointed to a lack of knowledge as a problem. Other notable challenges included the substantial emotional and mental effort required to participate in these activities, as well as the limited or superficial interest from the target audience.

Scientists generally attribute their passivity in science communication to several factors: lack of time, knowledge, financial resources, and specialist support. Additionally, they note that the University of Latvia lacks a unified approach with clear goals and support for science communication. Respondents emphasized the need for scientists to improve their communication skills, as this would benefit both their own work and the public's understanding of the importance of research. It was also mentioned that science communication is sometimes not regarded as a formal work obligation but rather as a voluntary initiative, with group leaders not always valuing participation in such activities. As a result, science communication efforts often lack alignment with specific goals, are conducted sporadically, lack motivation, and are performed mainly to fulfil numerical targets or reporting requirements.

During semi-structured interviews with department and laboratory heads, the scientists demonstrated a deeper understanding of the goals of science communication, recognizing the need to popularize their research results and maintain visibility with the public. They emphasized that each science communication activity they undertake has a clear, specific purpose. These findings align well with broader research which suggests that the scientists who face pressure to compete for grants and funding tend to use science communication more strategically, as a tool to enhance their visibility and promote their work to a wider audience (Kessler *et al.* 2022).

Conclusions

In their practice of science communication, scientists utilize nearly all available communication channels. They actively participate in events like the "European Researchers' Night", share information on social media through both personal and institutional profiles, post updates on projects or institutional websites, and engage local media. Additionally, many scientists are willing to participate in radio and television programs to discuss scientific achievements.

The "European Researchers' Night" is the most popular platform for science communication, as confirmed by both survey responses and project reports. Beyond this, scientists frequently use social media posts and project or institution websites for communication purposes. The activities at the "European Researchers' Night 2023" included all major science communication models – the Knowledge Deficit, Dialogue, and Participation models – though there was a noticeable emphasis on the Knowledge Deficit model.

When engaging in science communication, scientists seek to feel valued, involved, and respected by society, while also expecting recognition from their peers and leadership. However, factors such as lack of time, knowledge, financial resources, and specialist support often lead to passive participation or non-participation. Additionally, the absence of university's cohesive science communication strategy with clear goals and support exacerbates this issue. It is not necessary for all scientists to engage in science communication, but it is crucial for group leaders to find a balance between quality and quantity by involving those scientists who are skilled in communication, understand its goals, and are motivated to participate.

The research also identified two distinct groups of scientists: those who do not consider science communication as part of their job responsibilities and only engage in it to meet numerical requirements or avoid it entirely, and those who are genuinely interested in educating the public through science communication. Furthermore, a strategic group of scientists views science communication as an opportunity to attract new talent, promote their work, and build partnerships.

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 *Dr. sc. comm.* Marita Zitmane.

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Changes in Use of Television News and Informative Content and Their Impact on Content Creation. Analysis of Latvian Practice (January–April 2024)

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Abstract. The aim of the research is to establish what platforms and technologies the Latvian audience chooses for consuming television news and informative content, the reasons guiding this choice, as well as the effect of this choice by audience on the creation of content by television channels in Latvia. The theoretical basis of the work consists of theoretical works explaining the media ecology, transformation and convergence of the media environment, theories on the interaction of the media and the audience – the theory of agenda setting, use and satisfaction, as well as a theoretical look at the importance of television in the media environment and the characteristics of its audience.
Secondary data analysis was used to obtain research data, analysing Latvian audience studies, audience television news and informative content usage diary research, as well as semi-structured interviews with responsible specialists of the television industry. The data collected and compiled within the framework of the study confirm that the use and spread of Internet resources and technologies has influenced the behaviour of the audience in consuming television news and informative content. The study reveals important features of audience behaviour change concerning the habits of using television news and informative content, which directly affects the creation and distribution of this content.

Keywords: media, television, audience, information, technology, Internet

Introduction

"Television is dead, long live television?" – the question paraphrasing the slogan of the French monarchy used in different situations – "The king is dead, long live the king!" ("*Le roi est mort, vive le roi*!"), can be asked at the moment, observing the processes of changes in the media environment and evaluating the possibility of the place of cult media-rated television in this ecosystem. The time when television and gathering of social communities for spending evenings together, entertainment and receiving the latest news remains recorded in the 20th century. This era – the 21st century – has brought changes in the environment created by the Internet, which directly affects the behaviour of the audience, as well as the role and importance of media, including television, in society.

The media landscape is changing all over the world. The latest report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022" has identified changes in the global media environment, with the audience and revenues of traditional media inevitably flowing to online media, thereby threatening the ability of traditional media companies to operate successfully. The report also draws attention to the rapid growth in the influence and spread of social media, reporting that the number of its users worldwide has almost doubled in just five years, rising from 2.3 billion in 2016 to 4.2 billion in 2021 (UNESCO 2022).

Like others, Latvian society has experienced intensive changes in the use of media content in recent years, and in 2021 internet platforms, news portals and social media overtook television in popularity, which was the most common mass information resource in Latvia since 2018 (Nulle 2022). The popularity of Internet platforms continues to stabilize in the system of Latvian society's media usage habits; however, television content is still in the audience's basket of choices, according to the audience studies of recent years, commissioned by the National Electronic Media Council (NEPLP). Television content in the form of consumption has changed by adding interactive or time-lapse viewing to linear consumption, and, as revealed by the latest study conducted in autumn 2023, instead of a regular television, TV content is received by means of other technologies – computer, smartphone (NEPLP 2023).

Changes in media consumption are determined by global media convergence processes – the fusion and merger of traditional media and the Internet environment. Individuals and society as a whole, actively participating in the Internet environment, promote and create new media usage habits. Consumers are giving up reading newspapers, watching television and listening to the radio in linear time. The most important sources of information of the previous era – the press and electronic media – are being replaced by internet platforms, but the audience often chooses to consume radio and television programmes with a time lag. All these changes were facilitated by the intensive entry of new technologies and devices into everyday life, transformation in media content and form (Zelče 2018, 489–490).

Television channels are currently working as a content creator, meanwhile, the platform through which content is delivered to consumers is no longer just television – society's preferences for consuming this content have changed

(Legzdiņa 2018), and the audience's adherence to different platforms creates challenges for television content producers.

The study examines how global trends – the spread of different platforms and different technologies – impact the main consumption of television news, as well as informative content in modern Latvia and how changes in audience behaviour affect the creation of television content. The study reflects analysis of audience's choices, which are influenced by the spread and availability of the Internet and technology, as well as the consequences of these processes for work in the creation of television news and informative content.

The aim of the research is to determine what the audience's choices are in television news and informational content in modern Latvia under the conditions of internet platform and technology growth: which platforms and technologies, guided by what reasons does the audience choose in order to peruse television news and informational content, and accordingly – how does consumer's behaviour in television consumption of news and informative content affect the creation of this content in Latvian television channels.

Methodology

In order to achieve the goal of the research, several methods have been applied – secondary data analysis, diary method, semi-structured interviews, as well as qualitative and quantitative content analysis, applied when analysing the collected and compiled data.

At the beginning of the research, an analysis of secondary data was carried out for NEPLP annual studies on media use in Latvia, which allows to obtain a common picture of the use of television content in society – compared the data of the last years (2021–2023) on the consumption of television content in Latvian-wide studies with a sample base of $N = 1500$, which is a considerable amount of data and provides an overall insight into the choices of the Latvian television audience. Secondary data has been analysed for the rating data of Latvian television channels systematically conducted by the research company *Kantar* in a certain period of time – in the first quarter of 2024, comparing linear rating data and consolidated data, which includes interactive internet protocol television (IPTV) viewing records. These data highlight the situation in the consumption of television content in Latvian society, which can be determined by quantitative data, when watching content on TV.

Representatives of the television audience have also been involved in the research by using the diary method.

The diary has a good potential to reveal the meaning of people's daily life situations, the influence on actions, allowing to understand events directly from the perspective of individuals (Radcliffe 2018, 188–204).

Using the diary method, it is possible to achieve important research goals:

- getting reliable personal-level information about people's choices and habits;
- getting an idea of changes in people's choices and habits over time;
- causal analysis of changes in personal choices is possible (Bolger *et al.* 2018, 579–616).

Although filling in a diary is time-consuming – it requires both time and concentration, and researchers must expect that individuals may forget to enter data, so the data may be incomplete (Adams *et al.* 2014, 97), however, in diary studies, systematically recorded data and their compilation provides a more accurate picture of daily choices and habits than if these data are asked to be recorded in a one-time questionnaire, where respondents have to remember and evaluate events, thoughts and feelings, sometimes even for an indefinite period of time. In such a situation, the data is subject to all kinds of memory deviations – moreover, the longer the time between the event and its description, the more external factors influence its description (Nezlek 2012, 1–9).

The diary method is applied in studying the media environment. Uwe Hasebrink and Hanna Domeyyer, researchers at the University of Hamburg in Germany, piloted the diary method in a study on media use published in 2012 (Hasebrink, Domeyer 2012, 757–779), which Hasebrink referred to also in later publications, continuing to study media use, and paying attention to the possibilities of studying an individual's media use practice or media repertoire. Analysing the diaries, the researchers conclude that the essence of media use cannot be understood only by quantitative data recorded in the diary – the time and duration of media use, the attitudes recorded in the diaries give an important picture, which sometimes give a more valuable overview than behavioural indicators. Furthermore, diary data enables observation of the extent to which online media use threatens traditional media, and researchers conclude that patterns of individuals' media repertoire formation are often more complex than expected (Hasebrink, Hepp 2017).

In order to assess the behaviour and choices of the Latvian audience in the consumption of television news and informative content, as well as aspects related to the attitude towards the availability and importance of this type of content, within the framework of the current research, an audience study was conducted by means of the recording of television news and informative content in semi-structured diaries. 20 respondents took part in the diary study, recording their habits of using television news and informative content for one week or 7 days in the period from 1 April to 7 April 2024.

Respondents noted information about each episode of television news and informative content use in diary forms specially designed for this study, recording not only traditional television viewing, but also reception of television content on other devices – computer, telephone, etc.; and on various platforms – interactive television, internet platforms, social networks. At the end of each day, unclear or additional information could be marked in a special section for daily notes. Furthermore, the participants were asked to describe their daily rhythm on each day of the study, and in order to receive as accurate data as possible about the use of TV news and informative content on a daily basis, they were asked to continue their usual daily rhythm during the study, without subordinating it to filling in the diary. In the relevant sections of the research diaries, the participants answered the following questions about each episode of using television news and informative content: 1) viewing time (hours); 2) duration of viewing; 3) the watched program (creator, name or description); 4) source (where it is viewed – television channel, internet portal, etc.); 5) motivation; 6) benefit after viewing; 6) the technology/device used; 7) justification for choosing the device.

The participants for the study were approached individually, taking into account personal contacts, as well as using the personal contacts of the participants already approached for the diary study. All participants were adults, aged 26–76: three participants were under 30, seven were 31–40, two were 41–50, seven were 51–60 and one was 60+. Seven men and 13 women participated in the study. The participants were informed that the questionnaires were anonymous and that the results would be used in compiled form. To describe the data, the research participants were assigned a random number. The data recorded in the diaries were collected in *Excel*, where the data of each participant was entered and a summary of the data of all participants was created for further data analysis. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data

After receiving audience data, 5 semi-structured interviews were conducted. To supplement information on television ratings research and to obtain information about changes in the behaviour of the television audience that can be detected in the data, an interview was conducted with Oskars Rumpēters, director of media research clients of the research company *Kantar*. To establish how changes in the use of television news and informative content by the audience in Latvia currently affect the work on television, leading employees of Latvian television channels who are competent to provide information on adapting the production of television news and informative content to the audience's interests and choices in consuming this content were interviewed. Interviews were given by:

- Head of LTV News Service Iveta Elksne;
- TV3 Group Latvija Programme Director Elīna Jēkabsone;
- TV24 Programme Director Rūdolfs Ēķis;
- ReTV Editor-in-Chief Inga Gorbunova.

When using the interview approach in research, the selection of the interview sample is always important: the interviewees must be oriented and informed about the data and problems that the researcher is investigating (Gubrium *et al.* 2012, 9). Interviews with Latvian television channels LTV, TV3, TV24 and ReTV employees responsible for the creation of news and informative content elucidate the perspective of television professionals on specific problems raised in the study regarding changes in audience habits that refer to the production process of television content, as well as give the opportunity to hear real solutions, which are already being carried out or planned in television newsrooms, adapting the production of news and informative content to changes in audience behaviour.

Results

The habits of the audience in receiving and consuming television news and informative content are related to the spread of the usability of the Internet and technology, as well as acquiring information on several screens and on various platforms – the media consumption behaviour of the audience has changed, which is recorded by Latvia-wide studies, including audience representatives and television industry professionals. This can also be observed when evaluating the data obtained and analysed in the work study.

The analysis of secondary data carried out as part of the study, which outlines the overall situation in the country in the consumption of television content, yields the conclusion that the Internet has significantly affected the role of television as a medium in society. The analysis of television rating data and an interview with a rating researcher reflect the changes in the behaviour of the Latvian audience in television consumption and reveal that the most common use of television in Latvia is the interactive television, i.e. a platform that permits watching of the content with a time delay and which requires the Internet.

The characteristics of the audience's behaviour, which has been influenced by the popularity of using the Internet and technology, are convincingly revealed in the diary study conducted by involving the audience. The choice of the diary method was justified, because the diaries provided a relatively large amount of data: 20 participants, noting their habits of watching TV news and informative content for seven days, provided data for a total of 140 days, recording them in real time and not according to memory or self-assessment, as the questionnaire method would provide. In addition, as researchers Hasebrink and Domeyer concluded in a study of media usage on the basis of diary entries, this is a suitable method to record the data which suggests how much the use of online media threatens traditional media and shows the individuals' usage patterns of the media repertoire (Hasebrink, Domeyer 2012). The diary-based study confirms similar conclusions – the media use by individuals today is a complex process that covers a wide area by simultaneously consuming multiple media, platforms and technologies, literally growing up with content-consuming devices on a daily basis.

The multi-functionality of the audience in the consumption of various information resources and the use of screens has significantly changed the production process of television and the news and informative content produced by it. The interviews given by the responsible employees of Latvian television channels can be evaluated as expert interviews, as they allow us to learn about the behaviour, experience and strategy of television as a company, adapting to changes in the consumption of television news and informative content. In the assessment of professionals responsible for the media, the work of television is changing fundamentally, from the content creator of one platform and one device nowadays turning into an information resource of many different devices, thus complicating the work of both the television services and the work of television journalists. As dense as the supply of information consumption is today, the work of a television journalist extends far beyond the boundaries of the television airwaves and airtime.

The TV industry has been adapting to changes in audience behaviour for several years. The news and informational content produced in television newsrooms can no longer be related only to television as a medium – the television newsroom is only the creator of this content, but its distribution is related to various popular and demanded by the audience platforms and devices.

Audiences today have ever-increasing ways to receive content – more than ever before. Audience members use different platforms and technologies, assemble their use in different ways, and even use several technologies at the same time. The reach of technologies, devices and platforms has become available on a daily basis and makes the use of media progressively convenient, while the flow of content is becoming increasingly dense and complex, and it is irreversibly changing the requirements of content creation and distribution, creating new challenges for TV news and informative content creators.

Below is a schematic visualization of the flow of TV news and informative content, which depicts the path of content from television to the audience today, taking into account the availability of various platforms and devices employed by the audience and confirming the need for content creators to use them all to reach the audience.

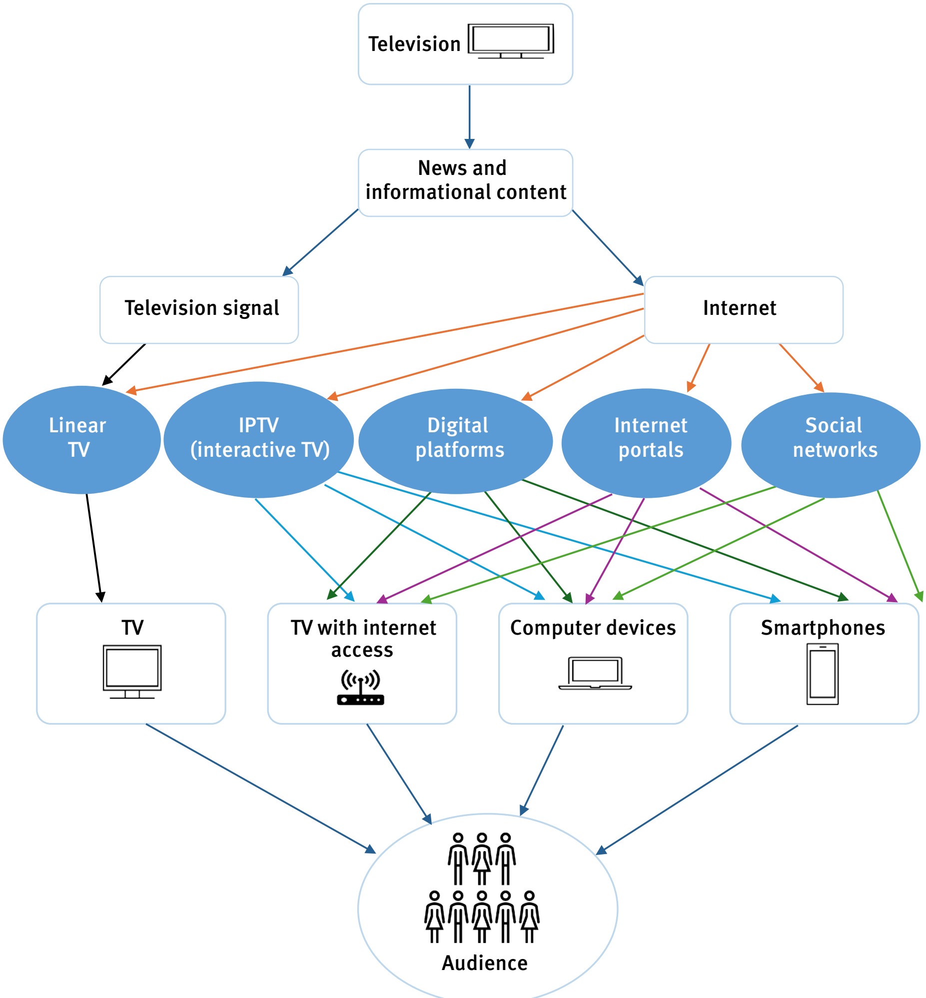

Figure. The path of TV news and informative content from television to audience

Conclusions

In the course of the research, a convincing influence of the daily usability and spread of Internet resources and technologies on the behaviour of the audience in the consumption of television news and informative content was confirmed. The change in the behaviour of the audience is endorsed by the audience studies conducted in the country and the television rating data analysed in the study, the review of the daily usage habits of TV news and informative content of the audience representatives, as well as by interviewing industry professionals whose responsibility is the creation of TV content. Moreover, the study confirmed the impact of changes in audience behaviour on the creation of television news and informative content.

Audience preferences in consumption of TV news and informative content in modern Latvia, in the context of the increasing usability of internet platforms and technologies

The form of consumption of television news and informative content in society has changed: interactive television has joined the consumption of linear content, which has become the most popular type of television in Latvian households, – informative and news programmes are consumed with a time lag, as well. Not only television is used for consuming TV news and informative content, but also Internet platforms – portals and social media. TV news and informative content is no longer consumed only in video format – likewise, the audience receives news in written format, which can be found on Internet platforms, whilst being authored by television. One audience member uses several different platforms to receive TV news and informational content.

The consumption of content for the audience is no longer connected to one device – the TV, the content is received and used on different screens, computers, tablets and smartphones have joined the television. Most often, the use of the device is related to convenience and availability at the given time and situation, the use of other devices is often justified by the possibility of receiving television content outside the home. One audience member may use several different devices to consume television news and informational content.

TV news and informative programmes are more often viewed on television, and their fragments – on social networks and Internet platforms. The choice of programmes is more often deliberate, motivated by finding out current events, opinions, information, but the reception of TV news and fragments of informative content is more often related to accidental attention while browsing Internet portals or social media. The choice of informative resources is related to the device used to receive the content.

In general, the audience consumes programmes, fragments of TV news and informative content of various lengths, but shorter video materials (up to 30 min. in various categories) are consumed more often than long ones. One member of the audience tends to consume different television news and informative content, devoting different amounts of time to it – the same viewer tends to choose programmes longer than 30 minutes, and consume short television informative content – fragments. The duration of content consumption is most often related to the selected device.

Nowadays, the audience of television channels and programmes, or its interests can no longer be evaluated only according to the current TV audience accounting procedure in Latvia – the TV meter methodology is a measurement of TV screens, but it does not measure all viewing, as other screens that are measured by internet measurement methods are not included.

However, the TV meter methodology is currently a generally recognized method that has not yet been approved for total TV+Internet measurements and the implementation of which will require additional funds. Meanwhile, the behaviour and interests of television audiences should be assessed by combining measurements of television and Internet platforms used by channels.

The influence of audience behaviour on the creation of TV news and informative content

Television news and information content creators not only create linear television content, but also reach audiences on other platforms by creating and using television channel web portals, digital platforms on the internet, and social media accounts. These platforms, like television, are provided with news and informative content on the daily basis. The Internet and social media are used as tools to reach, retain and engage with audiences.

In order to reach the audience on other platforms, special content is planned by the editors of TV news and informative content – it is created both specially, informing about events, creating insights into the programme, offering live broadcasts, etc., as well as deriving content units from the content already created for television. The production of short-content units from television content is more often used, since parallel content creation is associated with additional financial and human resource capacity.

Starting with TV news and informative content on the Internet and adapting it to other devices, not only the TV set, the range of tasks related to the technical preparation of the content increases for televisions – the content must be adapted for use on different platforms and devices so that all television materials are visually enjoyable and easy to view. The specifics of using the Internet require subtitles, a special graphic design that can also be seen on small screens, etc. to be used for TV materials.

In order to grasp and sustain the audience's attention, television news and informative content creators currently have to work on several different media platforms simultaneously. The range of responsibilities assigned to creators of TV informative content has increased – each participant must create content not only within the framework of his programme, but also provide materials – photos, texts, video, if necessary – a live broadcast signal – including Internet platforms used by television. This has significantly raised the professional requirements for producers of TV news and informative content.

Creators of television news and informational content recognize that a discussion is taking place in journalistic circles about the value and circulation of information in today's conditions, evaluating whether to post professionally conducted television informational work on Internet platforms, or to promote the profits of large technology companies and the popularity of social platforms. However, at the same time, it is recognized that such steps can be taken into account the behaviour of the audience and the choice to remain on these platforms. Therefore, the use of Internet and social network platforms for the distribution of TV news and informational content provides venues for appealing to the audience and is considered an additional opportunity to inform the public, in particular, providing a chance to deliver reliable news and informational content to the public.

Television professionals do not agree with studies that predict disappearance of the television audience and the difficulties of traditional media in adapting to the environment of new technologies. Instead, they demand that, within the framework of data collection and research, attention should be paid to the changes in the distribution of television content, which have been affected by the behaviour of the audience, following the development of the Internet and technology. Today, when evaluating television audience and channel distribution, the reception of television content on other platforms should also be assessed.

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.

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Theoretical Aspects of Communication Maturity Models and Draft Concept of Communication Maturity Model Adapted for Latvian Situation

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Abstract. In order to assess the capacity of the communication function in an organization, as well as the relationship between the potential and practice of the function, there is an increasing interest in theoretical literature on communication maturity models, or how and according to what principles to assess the actual communication function and compare it with communication excellence, or a mature, full-fledged and professional communication function. In the search for maturity models, researchers focus on various aspects of communication management, such as the institutionalization of communication function and the mandate given to the function, the enabling of the function, available resources, content management, assessment practices, understanding of communication functions and tasks both at the communication specialist level and at the institution's management level, etc. aspects. There is no unified concept of communication maturity in academic literature, and the approaches and criteria for assessing communication maturity are also different. A group of researchers from the University of Latvia and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, as a part of the evaluation of the communication function of state direct administration institutions and grounded in the theoretical concept of internal and external institutionalization of the communication function, prototyped a communication maturity model for assessing the communication function of public administration in Latvia.

Keywords: communication function, institutionalization, communication maturity, public administration

Introduction

In Latvia, in 2024, public administration communication received repeated criticism from both the President of Latvia and other officials and the media. Is it justified? As usual, there is no single explanation of the criticism. On the day of the Annual conference of public administration communication specialists in November, *Dr. pol.* Rihards Bambals, Director of the Strategic Communication Coordination Department of the State Chancellery, published a comment in the news portal delfi.lv with a symbolic title "Broomsticks also shoot and pagers explode", where, among other highlighted aspects, he referred to the evaluation of public administration communication by researchers from the University of Latvia and Vidzeme University College. "It must be said honestly that some of the conclusions of the evaluation are unflattering and can only be resolved through change management, which affects systemic and structural changes. For example, the implementation of strategic communication in practice is hindered by the support function assigned to communicators, the incapacity to use their potential, and the incapacity to involve them in the management processes of institutions, strategic planning, and decision-making. The attitude towards communication professionals is often like towards broomsticks. Let them be located in the same place in the institution's structure as the administration department and let them "sweep up" and "clean up" erroneous decisions or sloppy expressions by officials," writes Bambals (2024).

Within the evaluation mentioned by Bambals, the research group developed an approach based on the concept of maturity (and primary – institutionalization concept) as one of the important maturity criteria for the assessment of the communication function in institutions. The concept was grounded in the theoretical approach that communication maturity refers to the degree to which an organization or individual has developed its communication capabilities and effectiveness. It encompasses several key dimensions both from internal and external institutionalization perspective of the communication function. Furthermore, we decided to test in practice whether and how the concept of communication maturity can be used to increase the value of the communication function in the institution.

In order to evaluate the relationship between the potential and practice of the communication function, there is growing interest in theoretical literature on maturity models, or how and according to what principles to assess, document and compare the communication function in an organization in relation to communication excellence, or a mature, full-fledged and professional communication function. However, despite the research conducted over the last 10 years, including explicitly practical ones, there is "no consistent definition of the concept of communication maturity; the academic debate is not linked to the professional discourse" (Siegl, Zerfass 2024).

This publication summarizes maturity models described in academic literature and applied research as well as briefly outlines a communication maturity model for assessing the maturity of the communication function of public administration, developed by a research group from the University of Latvia and Vidzeme University College.

Results

Communication practitioners have already started to develop and promote as practical communication evaluation tools the maturity models for strategic communication, for example, focusing on content management (Contently 2018), internal communications and employee engagement (Staffbase 2021a, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2021), or communication measurement and evaluation – a survey-based diagnostic tool designed to help professionals at any level of sophistication, and from any type of organisation, better plan their measurement and evaluation journey by clearly benchmarking where they are starting from in the process (AMEC 2018). The UK government has assessed the maturity of its communications function by prototyping a maturity model based on the 5 OECD Principles of Good Communication Practice (OECD 2023).

Why the concept of the communication maturity? The concept of communication maturity is related to communication excellence and, in a way, it could serve as a communication management measurement and evaluation tool. European Communication Monitor (ECM) has covered communication excellence from different aspects in several ECM surveys. Excellent communication departments have been defined by setting two basic criterions: 1) performance, by that meaning the external results of the communication department's activities and its basic qualifications; 2) influence, by that meaning the internal standing of the communication department within the organization (Zerfass *et al.* 2021).

Both researchers and practitioners emphasize the importance and potential of using communication maturity models to assess and compare communication. At the same time, the communication maturity model also plays an equally important role in improving communication practice, striving for communication excellence. Therefore, in general, maturity models focus more on the assessing communication function in relation to communication excellence or the ideal communication function and its use in practice than on the assessment of everyday practice. The models described in the current literature are more suitable for the assessment of communication management practice than for the assessment of individual communication activities. In addition, the authors of the model concepts emphasize that the suitability of any model for assessment should be carefully considered and applied, taking into account the goals, values, and other factors of the organization, adapting the model to specific needs.

As mentioned above, several approaches to the concepts of communication maturity models and/or indices are currently described in the literature. At the International Conference on Public Relations Research, taking into account the increased interest and research related to the concept of maturity models, a review of conceptual approaches to maturity models was presented for the first time. The publication reviews three different, yet interrelated, approaches to communication assessment (see Table 1).

Table 1. Comparing communication evaluation, excellence, and maturity (Siegel, Zerfass 2024, 2)

Concept	Dimension(s) of analysis	Associated Models	Auxiliary	Application in Practice	Result
Communication evaluation	Communication activities and Communication management	Communication evaluation models/ frameworks, e.g., *PR Effectiveness Yardstick* (Lindenmann, 1997) *Integrated Framework for Evaluation&Measurement* (Buhman, Volk 2022)	Measurement	M&E methods and tools (for specific units of assessment), e.g., Social media tracking Stakeholder survey	Descriptive, prescriptive and/or comparative evaluation
Communication excellence	Communication management	Communication excellence models/ frameworks, e.g., Grunig *et al.* 2002 Tench *et al.*, 2017	Measurement	No auxiliary tools and programs for standardized application	Descriptive, prescriptive and/or comparative evaluation
Communication maturity	Communication management	Communication maturity models, e.g., CMI (Johansson *et al.*, 2019 M3 (AMEC, 2018) The Staffbase Internal Communications Assessment (Staffbase, 2021a)	Measurement	Assessment tools and methods (e.g., questionnaires, checklists) Maturity model tools for evaluation, improvement, and/or benchmarking	Descriptive, prescriptive and/or comparative evaluation

In this summary, communication maturity as a concept is compared with the concept of communication assessment and the concept of communication excellence. If in the first concept, the dimensions of analysis are communication activities and communication management, then in the second – only communication management, which, as can be seen, is associated with communication excellence models and frameworks. In the third – communication maturity concept – the dimension of analysis is communication management and currently there are three maturity models that assess communication management with different approaches:

- Within the concept of **Communication Maturity Index (CMI)**, maturity is defined as the development level of organizational leaders', communication professionals' and members' common perceptions and practices of communication in organizations. […] A maturity index indicates degree of progress made by an organization with respect to the issue that the index is designed to address. […] The approach is grounded in the concept of Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) that is based on the idea that organization emerges in and is sustained and transformed by communication and the communication value is co-created by all organizational members and is highly dependent on individual experiences and perspectives (Johansson *et al.* 2019). The authors' research method is a qualitative comparative case study with 85 key stakeholders from eleven organizations of different size. The communication maturity index is determined by analysing 6 main theoretical and practical aspects of strategic communication:

  Communication understanding,

  Communication function,

  Communication organization,

  Communication prerequisites,

  Communication competence,

  Communication practices and assessments.

The six dimensions describing communication maturity were categorized into 4 maturity levels – immature, emerging, established and mature. The authors also point out the need for further testing of the CMI prototype to avoid possible overly broad interpretation of the category ratings at each level (Johansson *et al.* 2019).

- AMEC[1] **Measurement Maturity Mapper (M3)** is a tool which enables PR professionals benchmark their communications measurement and

1 AMEC is International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication. It is the world's largest media intelligence and insights professional body, representing organizations and practitioners who provide media evaluation and communication research, analysis, evaluation and insights. For more information, see www.amecorg.com

makes recommendations for areas of improvement based on the Integrated Evaluation Framework and Barcelona Principles[2]. The method used by M3 is Background info captured to classify data and five point scale questions using frequency. The M3 covers three areas of evaluation:

Reporting: to what degree does the organisation measure communication outputs, out-takes, and outcomes. This is assessed both in terms of channels, metrics, and frequency;

Planning: how does the organisation approach communications planning, starting with setting objectives and KPIs, conducting research to inform strategy and tactics, and integrating with other marketing disciplines;

Demonstrating impact: to what degree does the organisation's measurement and evaluation go beyond channel metrics, and what methods do they utilise to make relative and causal links between communications and desire organisational results.

The result is a relative benchmark – by market, sector, organisation type or size – on where users are in their measurement and evaluation journey, both overall and for each of component. The three dimensions of communication maturity were categorized into 4 maturity levels – basic, standard, advanced and fully integrated (AMEC 2018).

- **The Staffbase internal communication maturity score** is calculated using the Staffbase Internal Communications Strategy Model. This model was created from deep insights into the communication success factors of more than 1000 companies of all different industries and sizes. The model has been validated by industry research and data, including the Gatehouse State of the Sector IC Survey. The method is – 28 statements are showed to the respondents who have to choose how much each statement applies to their communication team (Staffbase 2021b). The author of this article completed a test for research purposes about the institution she currently works for and indeed, within 10 minutes, she received a rating of "Your IC maturity score" on a 10-point scale, indicating that this is a concrete benchmark for how well the internal communications team of the institution is supporting and contributing to the company's strategic direction.

In addition to these briefly outlined communication maturity models, the following are certainly worth considering:

- **The communication maturity model developed and used by the British Government Communication Service.** The model is based on the OECD's 5 Principles for Effective Public Administration Communication (OECD 2021). The British government's communication maturity model, for

2 See Barcelona Principles 3.0 at https://amecorg.com/2020/07/barcelona-principles-3-0/

example, unlike the Swedish researchers' approach, includes an assessment of digital communication and a separate assessment category for the assessment of fake information and disinformation, which is currently so relevant. The index categorizes 4 levels of maturity in communication assessment, which are assessed by analysing 5 maturity-characterizing criteria:

Enabling the communication function;

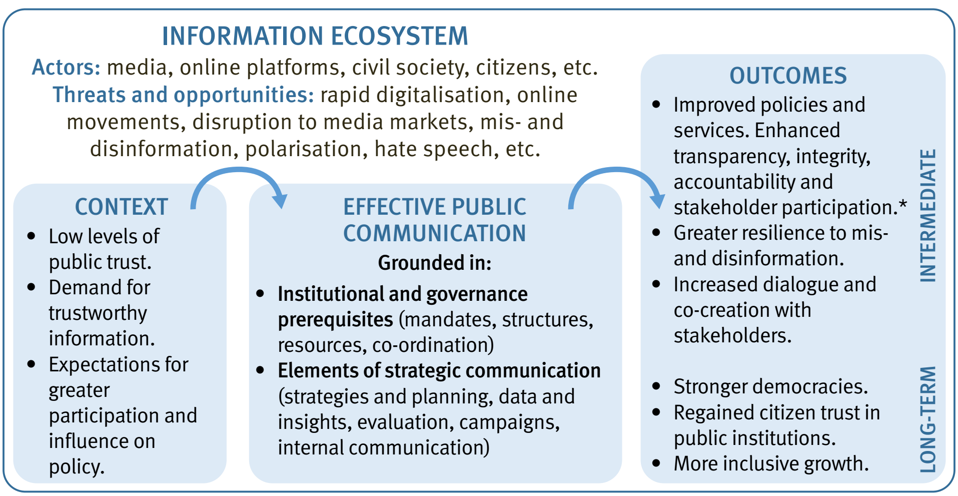
Institutionalization and professionalism of communication departments;

Fact-based and verified information in communication;

The potential of digital technologies and its use;

Fake information and disinformation, dealing with it.

- **OECD Report on Public Communication.** In the assessment report, the authors emphasize that the role of public communication has been more evident than ever in recent years. Changes in the information ecosystem have occurred in parallel with a series of international crises, directly affecting trust in the state's ability to protect society and ensure its well-being. In the sense of the OECD study (OECD 2021), public communication is understood as any communication activity or initiative led by public authorities for the benefit of society. It is different from political communication, which is related to political debates, elections or individual political individuals and parties. The conceptual basis of this assessment also forms the scope of the assessment of communication effectiveness, which is associated with the institutionalization and management (mandate) of communication, as well as the emphasis on the role of strategic communication.



*Principles that also inform effective communication

Figure 1. OECD analytical framework for public communication (OECD 2021, 23)

For the purpose of the surveys, public communication is understood as any communication activity or initiative led by public institutions for the public good. It is different from political communication, which is linked to the political debate, elections, or individual political figures and parties. They focused on the following 10 thematic areas:

Strategy and planning;
Audience and channels;
Campaigns;
Media engagement;
Digital communication;
Internal communication;
Crisis communication;
Evaluation;
Disinformation and media ecosystems;
Cross-cutting questions.

Communication maturity model adapted for public administration assessment in Latvia. Public administration communication assessment

Research group, having evaluated various communication maturity assessment models, has adapted several elements from individual maturity models in accordance with the Latvian cultural environment and local communication practice – while maintaining the basic theoretical and practical framework, the assessed statements have been adapted to the Latvian situation. The adapted communication maturity model is based on internal and external institutionalization criteria (Sandhu 2009).

In everyday usage, institutionalization describes the permanent establishment of a certain norm or social fact that is not constantly questioned. But institutionalization involves a dichotomy, as it can be analysed both as a process and as an outcome. As a process, it denotes the implementation and achievement of norms and routines within an organization or across institutions. Institutionalization as a process manifests itself in various formats, most often involving the institutionalization of practices, ideas and routines, making them unquestionable and self-evident values in an organization. Sandhu points to the external and internal factors of institutionalization that determine the level of institutionalization of the strategic communication function (Sandhu 2009, 81–82). The main factors of external institutionalization of the communication function are: (1) laws and regulations; (2) public demand and pressure; (3) the impact and diffusion of new practices. The internal institutionalization of communication, and especially strategic communication, is determined by the following aspects: (1) power – participation of communication specialists in decision-making processes; access to resources that help implement communication strategically; (2) independence/autonomy of the function – the location of the communication function in the structure compared to other functions, its level of independence, based on the idea that the more permanent the communication unit, the higher the institutionalization; (3) specialization and routinization, which is related to the general or specialized nature of the function's organization and the practices that are implemented and implemented (Sandhu 2009, 85).

The communication maturity model of state direct administration institutions is a prototype that has been repeatedly tested and improved. The approach of the institutionalization concept (Sandhu 2009) has been used to assess the communication function within the framework of the assessment. Considering that the aspects of external institutionalization are equivalent for all institutions under the study, the assessment was carried out in four aspects of internal institutionalization – the type of internal institutionalization of the communication function, the strategic communication mandate and communication tasks, available resources (human resources, financial, technological, etc. provision), strategic communication management and communication evaluation practice. Empirical data were collected by analysing institutional documents, interviewing as well as surveying specialists. The model determines four levels of communication maturity.

The model is not statistically validated or completed, therefore can't be used as an independent scientifically based method. Instead, it should be seen as a method in the development stage, which helps to reflect the level of development of the communication function compared to an excellent communication function. It is important to consider in the future this method would be better named the Communication Maturity Index, based on the self-assessment of the institution, rather than being used as an auditing method. However, within the context of the assessment mentioned earlier, the maturity assessment has allowed for a systematic evaluation of the communication function.

The assessment was systemic – it encompassed evaluation of the presence of systemic elements in communication or institutionalization, rather than the quality of their implementation, the quality of communication content and the professional quality of ensuring the communication function. The maturity level indicates how well the communication function in the institution is systemically institutionalized, enabled and empowered.

Conclusions

Maturity defines the state of an organization or function in relation to "a desired or normally occurring end stage" (Mettler 2011, 83, cited in Siegel, Zerfass 2024), maturity models delineate patterns in the development of organizational capabilities based on successive stages that map a desired development path from a baseline state to a target maturity level (Fraser *et al.* 2002, cited in Siegel, Zerfass 2024).

The concept of maturity and maturity models have attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners in various disciplines, such as strategic management, political science, and innovation management (Röglinger *et al.* 2012; Wendler 2012, cited in Siegel, Zerfass 2024). Communication maturity is

(1) a dynamic concept;
(2) that describes successive stages of development of communication management capabilities and practices in relation to a target state depending on;
(3) the alignment of communication strategy with organizational strategy;
(4) individual perceptions of organizational members;
(5) and capability-specific characteristics that influence creating and demonstrating the value of communication for organizational success;
(6) the purpose of the concept of communication maturity is to support the creation and demonstration of the value creation of corporate communications to the overall organizational success (Siegel, Zerfass 2024).

In most cases, qualitative research methods, such as interviews and document analysis, are used to obtain the necessary empirical data for the maturity level/index. As an added value of interviews, for example, checking the desired answers in the questionnaire, is mentioned. Also, interviews enable a better understanding of communication practices.

Maturity is essential in facilitating a way forward to improve organizations' communication evaluation and measurement practices, as well as empowering the communication function. Any implemented maturity model should serve as a tool for institutions to enhance the institutionalization of the communication function, strengthen its mandate, enable effective communication, increase the value attributed to the communication function and allow public administration fully and professionally utilize its potential. A fully and professionally institutionalized and enabled communication function is a systemic requirement for communication specialists to work professionally and effectively.

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Mediatisation of Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine and Palestinian Terrorist Group Hamas Attack on Israel: Framing Analysis of War Representations on News Portal "LSM.lv" (24 February 2022–7 April 2024)

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Abstract. The aim of the research is to establish how LSM.lv mediatizes both war conflicts and what kind of framings can be identified in the representations of both wars. The theoretical part of the research includes explanations of mediatization, representation, news values and framing approaches. The methodology consists of quantitative and qualitative content analysis, framing analysis and semi-structured interviews. The results show that the news portal LSM.lv produces high quality news, not only informative, but also diverse in terms of topics, regarding both the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and the attack by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas in Israel. The publications are also objective and, despite the different circumstances influencing the two conflicts, LSM.lv maintains journalistic professionalism and does not portray journalists' positions or personal views on one or the other conflict.

Keywords: news, war representations, mediatization, framing, journalism

Introduction

In today's world, wars and various conflict situations have taken on new significance and become an integral part of daily life across the globe, affecting the politics, economies, and social structures of many countries. Physical presence in these conflicts remains challenging; therefore, most of the public still relies on news media to obtain information about ongoing wars and conflicts around the world. These media outlets, whether by sending their representatives to the locations or using various information sources, reflect and report on all the situations to the public. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has already lasted for more than two years, and the relatively recent attack by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas on Israel are two conflicts that have generated widespread international attention. Both wars cause significant destruction, claiming thousands of lives, and have a global impact on the political and economic situation. In such circumstances, news media play an especially crucial role, as they bear the responsibility not only for providing and making information accessible to the public but also for shaping the way how society interprets these two conflicts. With the onset of the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas attack on Israel and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the news portal LSM.lv closely follows and reports on these events to the public. Given various factors from both the media and society's perspectives, LSM.lv serves as one of the primary sources where the Latvian public can obtain information about the course of both conflicts. This means that the public is subjected to mediation and receives a specific type of representation of these events, which in turn can influence their understanding, opinions, and overall knowledge of the developments in both conflicts. The aim of the study is to determine how the Latvian-language news portal LSM.lv mediates Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the Palestinian terrorist group's Hamas attack on Israel, as well as to identify the types of framing present in the representations of both wars. To conduct the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. How is the process of mediation conducted on the news portal LSM.lv regarding Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the attack of Palestinian terrorist group Hamas on Israel?
2. How does the news portal LSM.lv frame publications related to the representations of both wars?
3. What influences the representations of both conflicts on the news portal LSM.lv?
4. What similarities and differences can be observed in the framing and representations of both conflicts on the news portal LSM.lv?

Methodology

For the research, the time period from 24 February 2022, to 7 April 2024 was chosen, and framing analysis was applied alongside qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Additionally, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with the foreign news editor of the news portal LSM.lv, Ģirts Kasparāns, the foreign news editor of *Latvijas Radio*, Rihards Plūme, and the foreign news editor of *Latvijas Televīzija*, Ina Strazdiņa. The research was conducted using a deductive approach. Initially, a selection of publications from LSM.lv was made using the keywords "Russia's invasion of Ukraine", "Ukraine", and "Israeli-Palestinian conflict". These were then systematically organized in separate tables according to their publication dates. The tables included a content analysis of the publications based on categories developed by the author:

1. **Date –** when the news was published;
2. **Author –** who wrote the news;
3. **Headline –** the title of the news piece;
4. **Event –** the event covered in the news;
5. **Cover Image –** the main image accompanying the news;
6. **Additional Information Sources –** whether the news includes references to social media posts, videos, images, or other types of information.

The tables also featured a framing analysis using a model adapted by the author, based on Johan Vincent Galtung's concepts of "peace journalism" and "war journalism", as well as framing categories proposed by Crispin Maslog and Seow Ting Lee for "peace journalism" and "war journalism". The basis of the framing analysis model is Galtung's concept, complemented by an additional section from framing categories of Maslog and Ting Lee that addresses language usage in news reporting.

Table 1. Adapted Framing Analysis Model

Peace/Conflict Journalism	War/Violence Journalism
1. Oriented towards Peace/Conflict • Explores the formation of conflict; side X, side Y, Z issues; overall focus on mutual benefit. • Open space and time; any causes and outcomes, including historical/cultural contexts. • Ensures transparency and clarity of the conflict. • Gives "voice" to all sides; empathy and understanding. • Views war/conflict as a problem, focusing on conflict creativity. • Humanizes all sides; the more weapons, the worse. • Acts proactively: prevention before violence/war begins. • Focuses on the invisible sides and consequences of violence (trauma and fame, damage to structure/culture).	**1. Oriented towards War/Violence** • Focuses on the "arena" of conflict; two conflicting sides – one victory, with a zero-sum orientation. • Closed space and time; causes and resolutions are confined to the "arena", focusing on who "threw the first stone". • Makes the war opaque and unclear. • "Us-Them" journalism, propaganda, voice for "us". • Views "them" as the problem, focusing on gaining an advantage in the war. • Dehumanization of "them"; the more weapons, the worse weapon. • Reacts rather than acts: waits for violence before reporting. • Focuses on visible consequences of violence (killed, wounded, and material losses).
2. Oriented towards Truth • Exposes untruths from all sides. • Reveals all cases of concealment.	**2. Oriented towards Propaganda** • Exposes "their" untruths. • Helps maintain "our" lies.

Peace/Conflict Journalism	War/Violence Journalism
3. Oriented towards People • Focuses on suffering around the world; on women, the elderly, children, giving "voice" to those without one. • Names all who commit wrongdoings. • Focuses on people who promote peace.	**3. Oriented towards Elite** • Focuses on "our" suffering; on capable elite men, giving them "voice" and allowing them to speak through the media. • Names those on "their" side who commit wrongdoings. • Focuses on the elite who promote peace.
4. Oriented towards Solution • Peace = absence of violence + creativity. • Highlights peace initiatives to prevent future wars. • Focuses on structure, culture, and peaceful society. • Outcomes: resolution, restoration, reconciliation.	**4. Oriented towards Victory** • Peace = victory + truce. • Peace initiatives are hidden until "victory is in hand". • Focuses on treaties, society controlled by institutions. • Moves to another war or returns if the previous conflict reignites.
Language	
5. Avoids language that favours victims – reports and explains what people have done and could do, and how people are coping.	**5. Uses language that favours victims** – for example, "poor", "devastated", "vulnerable", "miserable", "tragic", "demoralized", when describing people.
6. Avoids language that incites dislike – uses precise descriptions, names, or terms.	**6. Uses language that incites dislike** – for example, "cruel", "horrible", "brutal", "barbaric", "inhumane", "tyrant", "savage", "terrorist", "extremist", "fundamentalist".
7. Uses moderate and objective language – avoids emotional words, uses strong language only in the gravest situations, avoids exaggeration.	**7. Uses language that evokes emotions** – for example, "genocide", "murder", "massacre", "systematic rape", or "forced displacement".

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted on the basis of fifteen main questions, which were adapted during the interview to the relevant event, namely, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine or the attack of Palestinian terrorist group Hamas on Israel, and supplemented based on the responses given by the interviewees:

1. What are the main sources from which information about events is obtained?
2. Is it important to confirm the obtained information through multiple sources?
3. Considering the potential risks of fake news and disinformation, how is the information verified?
4. How is the language barrier addressed?

5. Is there any kind of collaboration with other news media – in Latvia and abroad – to obtain information?
6. How about information coming from the government? Can it always be trusted?
7. How is it ensured that news about events is objective and does not give undue attention to one country or the other?
8. What about the choice of language and terminology used to reflect the events?
9. Which events receive the most attention?
10. Which events are not adequately covered?
11. What is the most challenging aspect of creating news about these two events?
12. How important is it to include audiovisual and visual material, such as images from the event location, in the news?
13. How important is it for a correspondent from the media outlet to be on the ground?
14. Does funding affect the representation of news?
15. Is there a set number of journalists who work on and create news about these events?

Johan Vincent Galtung developed the concepts of "peace journalism" and "war journalism" to identify how media outlets frame conflicts. These concepts offer two competing frames, each divided into four categories. "Peace journalism" is oriented towards peace/conflict, truth, people, and solutions, while "war journalism" focuses on war/violence, propaganda, elites, and victory. Each category explains why certain news falls under either frame. According to Galtung, a news piece cannot mix both frames – if it aims to support peace, it cannot adopt the perspective of "war journalism" (Galtung 2003, 178). Crispin Maslog and Seow Ting Lee highlight that "peace journalism" aligns with a framing approach, where framing analysis organizes news content through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration. They expanded on Galtung's concepts by developing their own model of "peace journalism" and "war journalism," each with 13 indicators to classify news content (Lee, Maslog 2005, 325–326).

Professors Patti M. Valkenburg and Holli A. Semetko argue that news frames act as "conceptual tools" used by media and the public to convey and interpret messages. How news is framed influences the message received, shaping public perception, beliefs, and opinions about global events (Semetko, Valkenburg 2000, 94). Framing analysis in media can be conducted inductively or deductively. The inductive approach freely explores news without predetermined frames, identifying them during the process. It suits small samples but is difficult to replicate. The deductive approach uses predefined frames, identifying only those during the study. It is suitable for large samples, allows for comparing different media, and can be reused in other studies (Semetko, Valkenburg 2000, 94–95).

In analysing LSM.lv publications, content analysis categories were developed. Quantitative analysis provided numerical data on publication frequency, authors, dates, and topics, while qualitative analysis offered in-depth examination of news and interview content. Content analysis is a method for systematically identifying message characteristics to infer meaning. It can analyse various forms of social communication, including documents, transcripts, photos, and videos (Berg 2001, 240). Divided into quantitative and qualitative methods, content analysis can address either numerical aspects or the deeper meanings of communication (Berg 2001, 2–3). Though they can be used independently, both approaches are often combined – quantitative analysis measures frequency and duration, while qualitative analysis interprets the meaning. Content analysis can study nearly any form of communication from either a quantitative or a qualitative perspective (Berg 2001, 241). In media research, content analysis is widely used to classify and analyse communication systematically based on predefined categories. However, it cannot determine the impact of content on its audience, focusing solely on the material itself (Berger 2016, 390–392).

The selected publications on the news portal LSM.lv allowed content analysis to determine how Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Hamas's attack on Israel were framed. To further understand the media's process, three semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key editors: Ģirts Kasparāns (LSM.lv), Ina Strazdiņa (Latvian Television), and Rihards Plūme (Latvian Radio). These interviews provided insights into decision-making processes, source verification, and news framing. A semi-structured interview is a type of qualitative interview that is in-depth and flexible, with a clear purpose. It encourages the interviewee to express their views and provide explanations on specific topics (Byrne 2004, 180–182). Interviews in research offer flexibility in adapting questions, provide richer, in-depth answers, and allow for observing nonverbal cues like expressions and gestures. They also give the interviewer control over the environment and question flow, enabling spontaneity and ensuring responses are genuine and independent. Interviews ensure completeness, as questions can be revisited if needed. They also allow for the documentation of key details, and the ability to ask complex questions with explanations helps gather deeper insights that other methods might miss (Bailey 1994, 157–158). Interviews have several drawbacks, including high costs, the time required for preparation, conducting, and analysing, and difficulties in reaching respondents, especially those in different regions or reluctant to share openly. Interviews can be hard to anonymize and standardize, often needing adjustments for each participant. Moreover, not all questions may be answered meaningfully, even if responses are provided (Bailey 1994, 158–159).

Results

The study analysed a total of 191 news articles on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and 162 articles on the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas attack on Israel. The publications were analysed over the period from 24 February 2022, to 7 April 2024. Additionally, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with LSM.lv foreign news editor Ģirts Kasparāns, Latvijas Radio foreign news editor Rihards Plūme, and Latvian Television foreign news editor Ina Strazdiņa. The news portal LSM.lv has consistently followed both conflicts – Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the attack of Palestinian terrorist group Hamas on Israel – since their early days, regularly publishing updates almost every day on the developments of both events. However, greater attention has been focused on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as evidenced by the large number of news articles published nearly daily on this topic. Nevertheless, there have been several days when LSM.lv did not publish any news regarding one or the other conflict. Through the analysis of publication framings, it was determined that "peace journalism" framings were identified in all the analysed news articles, indicating that both conflicts are framed within the context of "peace journalism". In the news portal LSM.lv publications covering Russia's full-scale invasion, the most dominant factor within the "peace journalism" framing is an orientation towards peace/conflict, identified in all 191 analysed articles. The next most prevalent factor is a focus on people, which was observed in 113 articles. This is followed by a focus on truth, identified in 87 articles, and a focus on solutions, which appeared only in 21 articles. Additionally, the framing analysis revealed that LSM.lv uses moderate and objective language in its news, avoiding language that provokes hostility and refraining from language that overly favours victims – these three factors were found in all the analysed articles. In the LSM.lv news articles covering the attack of Palestinian terrorist group Hamas on Israel, the most frequently identified "peace journalism" framing factor is an orientation towards peace/conflict, found in all 162 analysed articles. Similarly, the next most prevalent factor is a focus on people, identified in 142 articles. This is followed by a focus on truth, which appears in 123 articles, and finally, a focus on solutions, identified in 98 articles. Just as with the coverage of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, LSM.lv also employs moderate and objective language in its publications about the Hamas attack on Israel, avoiding language that provokes hostility or overly favours victims – these language factors were identified in all 162 analysed articles. The data obtained for both conflicts indicate that they are framed within the context of "peace journalism". The similar number of factors identified for each conflict suggests that LSM.lv follows a similar approach or principle in reporting on both Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas attack on Israel. This approach involves thoroughly investigating and explaining the causes, reasons, and consequences of the conflicts, providing extensive information on the events, thereby enhancing transparency. The news articles incorporate perspectives from multiple parties involved, uncovering truths and falsehoods from both sides of the conflict. They also focus on people, detailing how the events and the conflicts as a whole affect them, and they make efforts to explore potential peace solutions to end the conflicts. All these aspects are communicated using language that is generally objective, avoiding emotional manipulation. The news does not use sensationalist language or terms that could overly attract the audience's attention or provoke specific emotional reactions. The information and data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the foreign news editors of LSM.lv, Latvian Radio, and Latvian Television not only complement the news analysis but also confirm it. The journalists' statements in the interviews affirm that the primary goal is to produce publications that explain the conflicts to the audience, ensuring that they receive as accurate and truthful information as possible, presented in an objective manner. Although all three media outlets acknowledge that they have maintained a neutral position in one conflict – the Hamas attack on Israel – while taking Ukraine's side in the other hostility – Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – the statements made in the interviews, emphasizing that the news is still produced objectively regardless of the media's stance, are corroborated by the news analysis and the data obtained.

Conclusions

The study determined how the Latvian-language news portal LSM.lv mediates Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas attack on Israel, as well as identified the types of framing present in the representations of both wars. In total, the study analysed 353 publications from the news portal LSM.lv during the period from 24 February 2022 to 7 April 2024. This included 191 publications on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, selected using the keywords "Russia's invasion of Ukraine" and "Ukraine", and 162 publications on the attack of Palestinian terrorist group Hamas on Israel, selected using the keywords "Israel and Palestinian conflict". The study was conducted based on theories of mediatization, representation, news values, and framing approaches. The analysis was carried out by the author of the study, who adapted and applied Galtung's concepts of "peace journalism" and "war journalism", as well as Maslog's and Lee's framing categories for "peace journalism" and "war journalism". Using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis, specific categories were created for the analysis of the publications, and three semi-structured interviews were conducted with LSM.lv foreign news editor Ģirts Kasparāns, Latvian Radio foreign news editor Rihards Plūme, and

Latvian Television foreign news editor Ina Strazdiņa. In the research section, based on the theoretical framework described in the master's thesis, a study was conducted involving the analysis of LSM.lv publications on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas attack on Israel, as well as three semi-structured interviews with the foreign news editors of LSM.lv, Latvian Radio, and Latvian Television. The mediatization process and the identified framing in the publications related to the representations of both wars were examined. Thus, summarizing the theoretical framework and considering the data obtained in the study, it can be concluded that the news portal LSM.lv provides high-quality mediation for both Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas attack on Israel. It creates and delivers well-crafted, informative publications to its audience, incorporating a wide range of information sources. The content is reliable, as the portal carefully selects and verifies information while covering both conflicts, even going to the conflict zones to ensure the information is as open and truthful as possible. Additionally, the news coverage of both conflicts is highly diverse.

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 Professor Vita Zelče.

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Assessing Media Literacy Projects: Methodological Perspectives and Solutions

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Abstract. Every year, new projects aimed at fostering media literacy are developed, often replicating elements of one another. Funders are interested in achieving the greatest possible impact. However, is the quantitative number of participants the only critical criterion for success? How can the effectiveness and sustainability of media literacy projects be measured? This article explores methodological difficulties in evaluating such projects and offers practical solutions for meaningful and sustainable assessment.

Keywords: media literacy, project evaluation, impact assessment, sustainability, Latvia

Introduction

There is a range of studies measuring media literacy levels within specific social groups or broader society, offering criteria for its assessment. Researchers and organizations have conducted these studies on behalf of national and European institutions.[1] However, resources on evaluating media literacy projects' sustainability,

1 For example, Celot, P. (2009). Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels; A Comprehensive View of the Concept of Media Literacy and an Understanding of How Media Literacy Levels in Europe should be Assessed. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/library/studies/literacy-criteria-report_en.pdf ; Pereira, S., Moura, P. (2019). Assessing Media Literacy Competences: A Study with Portuguese Young People. *European Journal of Communication*, 34(1), 20–37. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323118784821; Celebi, M. C., Copur, K. D. (2019). The Relationship Between Media Literacy Levels and Problem Solving Skills of Secondary School Teachers – The Vase of Nigde Province. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 14(4), 237–255. DOI: https://doi.org/10.29329/epasr.2019.220.14; For Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2021). Online Safety – Media Literacy Strategy. Mapping Exercise and Literature Review – Phase 2 Report. April. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/611293b2d3bf7f044143209f/2021-02-25_DCMS_Media_Literacy_Phase_2_Final_Report_ACCESSIBLE_v2.pdf; Xiao, X., Su, Y., Lee, D. K. L. (2021). Who Consumes New Media Content More Wisely? Examining Personality Factors, SNS Use, and New Media Literacy in the Era of Misinformation. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305121990635;

impact, and effectiveness remain scarce. Funders and creators of such projects aim for tangible results, often measured solely by quantitative indicators, such as participant numbers, or through basic participant surveys (Ločmele, Buholcs 2024).

This article examines the difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of media literacy projects, focusing on both individual project analysis and comparative studies, such as projects within a single country or those funded by similar sources (e.g., national budgets). During the latter half of 2023 and early 2024, on behalf of the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, conducted by me in collaboration with Professor Jānis Buholcs, a quantitative evaluation of the sustainability and impact of 27 media literacy projects implemented in Latvia from July 2020 to June 2023 was conducted (Ločmele, Buholcs, 2024). This evaluation also included a survey (mainly open-ended questions) of project developers and interviews with representatives of potential target audiences as equally significant methods. While the interviews provided insights into the channels through which various groups prefer to receive educational content on media literacy, they were less effective for assessing the impact of the developed projects, – a topic explored in greater detail in the article.

As the first publicly accessible study of its kind in Latvia, the methodology for quantitative analysis of project sustainability and impact was developed specifically for the Latvian context, adapting ideas from international scholars and media regulators' studies of media literacy activities.[2]

Relying on practical experience from researching media literacy projects, this article provides a comprehensive overview of existing difficulties. Several solutions are offered, related explicitly to evaluating such projects. The conclusion includes recommendations for future research directions on this topic. This work aims to contribute to the academic discourse on the subject and assist funders and implementers of media literacy projects in improving both the projects and their evaluation methods. The article explores two key research questions grounded in the context of Latvia: (1) Can the effectiveness and sustainability of media literacy projects be measured, and if so, how? (2) How can methodological challenges in this evaluation process be addressed based on the Latvian experience?

Greene, K., Yanovitzky, I., Carpenter, A., Banerjee, S. C., Magsamen-Conrad, K., Hecht, M. L., Elek, E. (2015). A Theory-Grounded Measure of Adolescents' Response to Media Literacy Interventions. *Journal of Media Literacy Education, 7*(2), 35–49. DOI: https://doi.org/10.23860/jmle-7-2-4

2 See the section of Sonja Livingstone's article "Optimising for Impact" at https://edmo.eu/2022/07/05/the-vital-role-of-measuring-impact-in-media-literacy-initiatives/; McDougall, J. (project lead) [Without date]. Evaluating Media Literacy with a Theory of Change: A Guide to Using a Theory of Change to Design and Evaluate Media Literacy Projects and Activities at https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/ToC-Guide-updated.pdf; OFCOM. (2023). A toolkit for evaluating media literacy interventions – OFCOM, November 10.

It is essential to clarify that in this article (and in the aforementioned Baltic Centre for Media Excellence study), the term "media literacy project" refers to a variety of initiatives, not all of which are explicitly named "projects". These initiatives align with the theme of media literacy, have identifiable implementers, and are publicly accessible. Examples include campaigns, videos, conferences, books, seminar series, and other activities to strengthen media literacy.

Evaluating media literacy projects: effectiveness and unique features

Evaluating media literacy project effectiveness is critical for several reasons, including funding allocation, assessment of outcomes, and considerations of quality and impact at a broader (e.g., national) level. While these reasons overlap with evaluating other (e.g., business) projects, media literacy projects require a different approach due to their unique objectives. Most are non-commercial projects prioritizing public benefit over financial gain, making it challenging to determine their impact, particularly for short-term interventions.

Nonetheless, similar to business projects, media literacy projects can also have defined criteria (or groups of criteria) for evaluation. For instance, project success and project management success (or project management efficiency) can be assessed as separate categories, evaluating aspects such as project costs, timeline, scope, and quality. One model for measuring project success and effectiveness is described as "a model of 27 items representing six key performance indicators (KPIs) comprising a performance evaluation framework focusing on time, cost, quality, safety, site disputes, and environmental impact" (Rode *et al.* 2022, 419).

Another approach emphasizes systematic data analysis, using a method similar to journalism, to address key questions: what, who, when, and how, which can help improve projects.

The "what" aspect focuses on the key elements and outcomes of a project, such as its interventions, deliverables, and overall value. The "who" aspect pertains to the individuals and groups associated with the project, including project managers, sponsors, and users who participate in its implementation and evaluation. The "when" dimension addresses the timing of the evaluation process, which can occur before the project begins (*ex-ante*), during its execution (interim), or after its completion (*ex-post*). Finally, the "how" aspect considers the approach to evaluation, where absolute evaluation assesses a single project in isolation, while relative evaluation compares multiple projects against each other (Rode *et al.* 2022, 419–420). However, some of these questions can only be answered internally within the organization. Evaluating projects "from the outside" requires a partially different approach.

Methodological difficulties in evaluating media literacy projects

Several methodological and practical challenges arise when measuring project effectiveness and sustainability, as summarized in Table 1.

For single (one-off) projects, difficulties include limited impact measurement or overly detailed evaluation, such as comprehensive surveys following a 90-minute seminar. Measuring the impact of such short interventions is difficult, as they typically provide only short-term knowledge gains. A common problem encountered in more extended activities, such as courses, is the limited number of valid questionnaires. Typically, there are more pre-event responses than post-event ones, but only paired responses – those completed by the same individual (e.g., identified by an anonymized code) – are suitable for comparison. Anonymity complicates tracking respondents who completed both surveys.

In smaller media literacy projects, impact assessments (if conducted) are usually performed by project creators, who often lack a transparent methodology. This typically involves simple quantitative indicators, such as participant numbers or game players.

On a broader scale, such as nationwide studies, challenges arise in comparing projects of varying nature, scale, funding, and duration. In Latvia, short-term (one-off) events are common, making evaluating their impact difficult due to the limited scope and duration of such activities. Furthermore, not all project information is publicly available, and creators may be reluctant to disclose specific details. Some sustainability and effectiveness criteria only become evident over time, such as whether newly created materials continue to be used, remain accessible online after a certain period, or whether the project demonstrates continuity, for instance, by inspiring subsequent initiatives.

Table 1. Methodological difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness and sustainability of media literacy projects

Research on effectiveness and sustainability of a single project	Research on sustainability and effectiveness of multiple projects (for example, nationwide comparison)
Difficult to measure the impact of short-term events (e.g., a 90-minute seminar)	Challenges comparing projects of different nature, scale, funding, and duration
No impact measurement or overly detailed evaluation, even for small interventions	A large number of short-term (one-time) events with impacts that are difficult to determine
Disparity between pre- and post-event survey responses	Limited publicly accessible information on projects
Evaluations often lack a clear methodology	Sustainability criteria often emerge over time, like the continued use and online availability of created materials

Some assessment criteria are easily quantifiable. However, there is significant reliance on the researcher's contextual knowledge and in-depth understanding of the field in many cases. This highlights the importance of carefully considering who is entrusted with conducting such research, as representatives of research agencies may lack sufficient contextual knowledge of the sector. For instance, identifying the funders of media literacy projects is relatively straightforward based on publicly available information, such as whether the funding comes from international partners or a national institution. Similarly, by examining the content and communication activities, it is possible to determine the target audience of a project (e.g., seniors, children, or teachers). Additionally, basic research can provide insights into the regularity of activities (e.g., whether it is a one-off event such as a conference or seminar or training conducted with a certain regularity) and the project's final outputs, such as training programs developed materials, or videos produced at the project's conclusion.

However, some aspects of evaluating media literacy projects require researchers to understand the field and its development deeply. For instance, assessing the novelty of projects demands extensive contextual knowledge of media literacy. This includes comparing projects based on the methods, themes, and target audiences they engage with to determine excellence in specific aspects of innovation. For example, it is important to identify whether a project addresses its target audience and thematic focus in a new and original way or follows pre-existing patterns, such as targeting students in schools with commonly explored themes like evaluating misinformation or identifying trustworthy media content. The novelty might also be reflected in focusing on less-discussed topics in Latvia or offering an interesting and less-explored combination of themes. Similarly, in terms of methods, it is crucial to evaluate whether projects employ widely used techniques or introduce innovative methods, either internationally or within Latvia. Thereby, a deep specialization in the field is required to conduct such an evaluation, which can introduce another risk – the researcher's potential overfamiliarity with the field.

For instance, in the evaluation of media literacy projects carried out within the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence initiative, the analysis of nine projects in which I participated as an author, co-author, or in another capacity was conducted by another expert (Ločmele & Buholcs, 2024). In a small country like Latvia, finding an expert with sufficient knowledge of this specialized field who has not been involved in any media literacy promotion projects over the past three years is highly challenging.

Practices of media literacy project developers

Media literacy project developers face diverse challenges when designing and implementing initiatives. Limited resources often dictate creative collaborations with schools, libraries, and other community institutions. In Latvia, many projects have successfully partnered with educational institutions to integrate media literacy activities into school/university curricula. Libraries have also played a pivotal role in providing accessible venues and digital infrastructure, significantly broadening the reach of these initiatives.

The following article explores the perspectives and experiences of media literacy project developers in measuring the effectiveness of activities they have organized and/or funded, based on the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence study and supplemented with commentary from the researcher's perspective.

A survey of project implementers revealed that some organizations and media literacy projects do not measure effectiveness at all. In contrast, others rely primarily on quantitative indicators, such as event attendance, game participation, or basic questionnaire responses. These simplified self-assessments – such as participants rating whether they gained new knowledge and skills – or metrics like seminar attendance numbers are often intended to meet funder requirements for reporting results. However, they do not provide meaningful insights into whether the intervention has genuinely improved media literacy skills, influenced behaviour, or whether the knowledge is applied in practice. Measuring such outcomes is highly complex and often cannot be achieved through a few simple survey questions, which remain the most common approach to effectiveness evaluation (Ločmele, Buholcs 2024).

Only a few projects, particularly those with a longer duration, have implemented specially designed methodologies for measuring effectiveness, highlighting a gap in robust evaluation practices across the field.

It should be noted that just as the practices of project representatives vary, so too assesses the sustainability of media literacy projects implemented in Latvia, as perceived by the project developers themselves. In response to an open survey question, their descriptions ranged widely, representing opposite ends of an imagined evaluation scale – from views that the projects are sustainable or even highly sustainable to judgments that there is not a single project that could be considered sustainable based on the longevity of its activities. This brings us to one of the fundamental questions: what is meant by the terms "effective" or "sustainable" in the context of media literacy projects, and what is being measured in each case to determine this? The aforementioned Baltic Centre for Media Excellence study reveals that while some criteria for a sustainable and effective project align in the views of project developers, others differ (Ločmele, Buholcs 2024).

First, specific criteria are essential during the project development stage, such as having a strategic vision or allocating funding for public communication of the project's outcomes. Second, even more criteria are mentioned as those that must be fulfilled after the project's implementation and often over several years.

For instance, has the project contributed to the growth of other projects, served as a steppingstone for other initiatives or ideas, and so on? However, such impacts can only be determined retrospectively through sectoral research conducted over a longer timeframe, such as a five-year period (Ločmele, Buholcs 2024).

Since the criteria for a sustainable and effective media literacy project and their measurement vary among industry representatives, organizing a seminar or training on project sustainability and effectiveness would be highly beneficial. Such an initiative could unify perspectives on long-term activities and sustainability criteria. Government authorities or international partners could lead this effort, inviting foreign experts to showcase the best practices. At the same time, the academic community could foster discussions on evaluation methodologies and practical research in this area.

From a policymaking perspective, presenting international examples of sustainable media literacy projects and their evaluations and actionable insights on adapting these practices to Latvia could drive progress in the sector. Otherwise, without efforts to enhance the knowledge of media literacy stakeholders regarding project effectiveness and sustainability, there is a risk of stagnation in project quality, effectiveness, and sustainability. For instance, scientific literature often discusses the definition of project efficiency, effectiveness, and efficacy in evaluating projects, which could be translated into Latvian as *efektivitāte*, *iedarbīgums*, and *lietderība* (Zidane, Olsson 2017, 621–641). These aspects could be studied separately to provide deeper insights into project evaluation.

How about the audience's perspective?

An often-overlooked aspect of media literacy project evaluation is the audience perspective. While projects typically aim to address their target groups' specific needs and challenges, evaluations rarely delve into whether participants perceive these efforts as effective or relevant.

One method for capturing audience perspectives is through post-event surveys and interviews. For instance, participants can provide insights into which parts of a project were most engaging or applicable to their daily lives. However, this approach has limitations, mainly when feedback mechanisms are generic or fail to account for diverse audience backgrounds. Moreover, audience diversity poses another layer of complexity. Media literacy projects often target broad demographic groups, ranging from school-aged children to senior citizens. Each group brings unique expectations, preferences, and prior knowledge. For example, younger audiences may appreciate gamified learning methods, but older participants prefer structured lectures or printed materials. Recognizing and addressing these differences is crucial for project success.

Surveying the target audience some time after a media literacy project has concluded – mainly when conducted by independent researchers rather than by those hired by the organizers – provides limited value. Identifying participants, especially for one-day events, is often challenging due to data protection regulations prohibiting sharing e-mail addresses. Broader surveys of the target audience rely heavily on locating individuals familiar with the project, with most respondents either aware of other initiatives by the organization or having no prior knowledge.

Generalizing the experiences of a few individuals, such as teachers, to the entire target group is problematic, and downloading counts of materials may not reflect actual use, as they could be downloaded once and used for years or never accessed.

Qualitative approaches may be more valuable for assessing the sustainability of media literacy projects beyond short-term effectiveness. These allow for a deeper exploration of motivation and practices around project outcomes while accounting for the diversity of typical media literacy audiences (e.g., youth, librarians, teachers, seniors) and their varying reasons for engaging with project results.

Advancing research on media literacy project effectiveness and sustainability

Future research directions in evaluating the effectiveness of media literacy projects could encompass several aspects to deepen understanding and enhance the impact of such initiatives. Potential research developments may involve closer collaboration with project implementers to access their audiences and investigate how the knowledge, skills, and competencies gained through media literacy projects are applied daily and whether or for how long they persist after project completion.

Evaluating the contribution of individual projects might prove challenging, particularly since media literacy project audiences often overlap (e.g., teachers or youth involved in multiple initiatives, making it difficult to isolate the impact of a single intervention). However, over a more extended period, it would be possible to explore the sustainability of acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies, including tracking changes in participants' self-assessments of their abilities and their actual capacity to critically evaluate information and similar skills over at least five years. Another potential area of research could examine behavioural changes – whether and how participants alter their information source selection habits after the project, whether media literacy recommendations are applied, and whether this knowledge is used to educate peers or family members.

Discussions are also needed to determine the optimal timeframe for evaluating the long-term impact of media literacy projects. For instance, is one year, two to three years, or more appropriate? Alternatively, should the evaluation period vary based on the scale and duration of the project, such as differing benchmarks for one-day events versus year-long programmes?

In exploring the sustainability of media literacy projects, it would be valuable to identify and propose a set of indicators that signal long-term effectiveness. For example, could reducing digital fraud cases be considered a measurable outcome? Could an increase in citizens' self-assessment of their ability to critically evaluate information over time indicate long-term project success, or might this metric have an illusory nature?

Cultural and contextual factors that influence the long-term effectiveness of projects should also be identified. For instance, is there a difference, and if so, what kind, when media literacy education for minority groups is conducted in their native language? Does the native language also influence their prior knowledge of media literacy topics? How do factors such as beliefs about key sociopolitical issues (e.g., democratic governance, Latvia's membership in the European Union and NATO, or trust in institutions) correlate with project outcomes? Understanding whether such correlations exist – and how they impact the durability of media literacy project results – would be an essential avenue for further study.

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Propaganda Messages in Social Media in Latvia's Information Space: Analysis of the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract. The goal of the thesis is to explore propaganda messages in the Latvia's information space in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, focusing on how the "we"–"you" discourse has evolved over time. The theoretical foundation of the thesis consists of theoretical approaches to propaganda, information warfare, and the impact of social media on warfare. For the empirical part of the master's thesis, 270 social media post from January, February, and March of 2022, 2023, and 2024 were analysed using quantitative content analysis. The research results indicate a pronounced "we"–"you" distinction in propaganda messages, which has evolved over time from a negative to a construction of a positive self-portrayal. However, the tendency to separate and polarize two societal groups remains unchanged. The main propaganda messages include attempts to reduce support for Ukraine, undermine trust in the government and international organizations, and aggressive action rationalization.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war, propaganda, discourse analysis, information warfare, social media

Introduction

Contemporary military conflicts significantly transform the information space – there is increasing discussion about information warfare, which is conducted through various means such as spreading disinformation, misinformation, fake news, and propaganda. Propaganda can achieve what cannot be accomplished in the physical world – it can emphasize victory even when there is a loss in reality. Information warfare is no longer just an auxiliary strategy but a parallel operation. Recent conflicts have demonstrated that the battle for hearts and minds is just as crucial as physical battles, and social media plays a key role in this process. Both state and non-state actors effectively use social media to gain public support, mislead, and intimidate opponents, and even for traditional military activities such as intelligence gathering. Political scientist Andis Kudors, in an article about information warfare, poses the question: "The media controlled by Russian authorities today are tools of information warfare. The same goes for those bloggers who, either for pay or voluntarily, fight on the side of the aggressor state – Russia – they remain a part of the aggression. Are we going to try to amicably negotiate with the aggressors to stop waging war against us?" (Kudors 2024). Later, referring to freedom of speech and censorship restrictions, he acknowledges that in a wartime situation, national security must be protected, and messages and media used as tools of information warfare must be restricted. It is worth noting that comprehensive and strong censorship helps the spread of propaganda in society (Ma 2016, 47); therefore, it is important to understand how to limit the dissemination of these propaganda messages. The new information environment has changed not only the nature of warfare but also how communication experts view the information space, leading to a greater focus on promoting media literacy and critical thinking. For example, there are various educational materials available on information warfare: The Latvian National Library has created a lecture titled "Information Warfare in the Media: How Not to Become a Victim" and "War and Public Relations: Can One Exist Without the Other Today?" (Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, Peipiņa 2022; Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, Šķestre 2022). Researchers discuss critical thinking and the public's ability to recognize false information or manipulation in broadcasts (Tomsons, Unāma 2022). These issues have gained prominence since the war began in 2014, but especially after 24 February 2022, as the techniques used in information warfare are an effective means of manipulating people. Therefore, it is important to study what the current messages are, how they have changed over time, and how these messages are constructed. Within this study, propaganda messages disseminated in the Latvian information space are analysed, focusing on messages in the Latvian language. The aim of the study is to investigate propaganda messages in the Latvian information space in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, focusing on how the construction of the "we" *vs* "you" discourse has changed over time. Two research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the main propaganda messages in the Latvian information space from 2022 to 2024, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war?
2. How is the "we" *vs* "you" discourse distinction defined in propaganda messages?

Methodology

The study employs content analysis, discourse analysis, and interviews. Content analysis is used to categorize the data. Discourse analysis is applied to analyse the categorized data from the content analysis more deeply and to understand its underlying meanings. Interviews are conducted to provide more precise explanations of the obtained data, with experts in communication and military public relations being interviewed. Expert interviews are used in the master's thesis because the concept of information warfare is relatively new in the military field in Latvia and has not been extensively studied. However, there are experts whose work is directly related to researching this phenomenon and who specialize in analysing and evaluating the information space.

The analysis was conducted for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024, focusing on three-month periods (January, February, March). The main messages disseminated on social media were identified, and interviews were conducted with experts to help explain the obtained data. Overall, during the quantitative content analysis, 270 various types of social media post (news, posts, comments, images, and videos) from *Facebook*, *X*, *TikTok*, *Telegram*, and *Reddit* were collected and analysed. Some of the reviewed material was not included in the content analysis table as they did not prominently display propaganda messages, but they were still considered to understand the context of the analysed period and the resonance of different topics on social media. The analysed time frame includes January 2022 (58 publications), February 2022 (41 publications), March 2022 (34 publications), January 2023 (33 publications), February 2023 (18 publications), March 2023 (22 publications), January 2024 (19 publications), February 2024 (21 publications), and March 2024 (19 publications). The examined publications are in Latvian. The analysis included both social media posts and comments under these posts to better understand public opinions. The analysed materials were selectively chosen, with the content analysis table including only those publications where propaganda messages were prominently observed.

Ruth Wodak's discourse historical approach was used to analyse the data. Wodak offers an analytical framework for analysing the "we" *vs* "you" discourse. The adapted framework for this study was derived from the doctoral thesis of researcher Laura Ardava-Āboliņa, in which the discourse of social memory and commemoration during Latvia's Third Awakening was analysed in the media (Ardava 2015). The framework was adapted for the study of propaganda and includes aspects of analysis relevant to the investigation of propaganda messages. The framework consists of four stages: (1) identifying argumentation strategies/techniques, (2) forms of linguistic realization, (3) propaganda objectives, based on the theory of Jowett and O'Donnell (2006), and (4) included messages derived from the key Russian messages defined in the research by NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. The included messages were supplemented during the analysis. In the empirical part of the master's thesis, 270 posts, comments, articles, images, and video materials from social media and news portals were collected, systematized, and analysed using quantitative content analysis. Two expert interviews were conducted – one with Rihards

Bambals, the head of StratCom at the State Chancellery and a political scientist, and the other with Colonel Māris Tūtins, the head of the Information and Analysis Department of the National Armed Forces of Latvia. The interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform, with each interview lasting 30 minutes.

Content analysis is a research method widely used in various academic disciplines, including communication studies, sociology, psychology, and political science. Klaus Krippendorff provides a foundational overview of the principles of content analysis, emphasizing its versatility and applicability in various research contexts. The primary goal of content analysis is to uncover latent meanings, societal norms, and cultural representations embedded within texts or media artifacts (Krippendorf 2018, 10). In this thesis quantitative content analysis was used to analyse and structure data that was obtained from social media – this method allows researcher structure big amount of data and see patterns within analysed data. Content analysis is typically used in conjunction with other methods that allow researchers to uncover deeper meanings. In this study, two additional methods were used – expert interviews and discourse analysis – to analyse the obtained data more comprehensively.

In this study, a semi-structured expert interview was used, which is one of the types of interviews. A semi-structured interview includes both structured questions (usually for obtaining factual information) and more general open-ended questions that allow the interviewee to provide broader insights into the specific issue (Kallio *et al.* 2016). The actual function of expert interviews in the development of individual research, their form, and the methods used to analyse results can vary in each case. Conducting expert interviews can help streamline the time-consuming data collection processes, especially when experts are considered "crystallization points" of practical internal knowledge and are interviewed as participants in a broader group of experts. Expert interviews are also suitable for situations where accessing a specific social field might be difficult or impossible (such as with taboo subjects). In addition to the direct benefits, it is clear that expert interviews offer researchers an efficient means to quickly obtain results (Bogner *et al.* 2009, 12).

To analyse deeper meanings discourse analysis was conducted. Discourse analysis is deeply grounded in various theories – those of society and power, as well as sociology and linguistics. Norman Fairclough's framework for discourse analysis is divided into three dimensions, as discourse is simultaneously considered to be: (1) text (spoken or written, including visual images), (2) discursive practice – the production, consumption, and distribution of texts, and (3) socio-cultural practice. In this thesis discourse historical approach was used. Ruth Wodak is one of the discourse theorists who has developed the discourse historical method (Amoussou, Allagbe 2018, 1–9). The historical method involves integrating as broad a historical context as possible when analysing specific discursive events. This method views ideology as (often) a one-sided perspective or worldview composed of related mental representations, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and evaluations that are collectively shared by members of a specific social group. Ideologies serve as important tools for creating and maintaining unequal power relations through discourse, such as by constructing hegemonic identity narratives or controlling access to specific discourses or public information (gatekeeping) (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, 88). In the context of propaganda, the power relations between the creators of propaganda and those who can be influenced by it can be analysed using Wodak's "we" *vs* "you" analytical framework. The division specified in the framework – content, argumentation, and linguistic forms analysis – allows the researcher to differentiate each level and view them as distinct units when analysing texts. Wodak discusses various strategies used in the "we" *vs* "you" discourse: (1) referential or nomination strategies: aimed at constructing and representing social actors. This is done in several ways: categorizing by affiliation using metaphors and metonymies, and in synecdoche form, where a part represents the whole or the whole represents a part; (2) social actors as individuals, group members, or entire groups: linguistically characterized through predications (generalizations). Predication strategies can be applied, for example, as linguistic forms of positive and negative evaluations of attributes; (3) argumentation strategies and methods of argument development (topoi): used to justify positive and negative statements (Wodak 2010, 17–60).

Results

The results were compiled by analysing the data on a yearly basis, looking for patterns and included propaganda messages, as well as searching for "we" *vs* "you" discourses.

1. Year 2022: "We" – humbled impoverished people, "you" – corrupt criminal government

The period before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 began with unrest in Kazakhstan, NATO talks with Russia, US talks with Russia, and a statement during an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) meeting about the increased likelihood of war in Europe, the highest in 30 years. These events had an impact on social media publications, but the theme of COVID-19 remained prominent in the informational environment, as well as discussions about the Latvian government and its actions. The Latvian government is frequently disparaged in posts, with various comparisons and metaphors used.

In most publications, the "we" *vs* "you" dichotomy is presented as a comparison between the people and the government. Analysing the "we" *vs* "you" discourse, it is observed that the Latvian people are defined as being oppressed, impoverished, and dissatisfied in contrast to the Latvian government, which is defined as a mafia, junta, or coup plotters. Overall, in the publications, the definition of "we" is observed as negative; there is no constructed positive self-image. Instead, a group definition strategy is used – defining "we" as victims, oppressed, and impoverished due to "you", where "you" are the Latvian government.

After the full-scale invasion, in the analysed publications, a "we" and "you" discourse is observed, which is related to the opposition between the people ("we"), who are either on Russia's side or neutral in the war, and those ("you") who condemn Russia's invasion. Additionally, there is a dominance of strategies for rationalizing aggressive actions. In the analysed publications, there is a tendency to define "you" as supporters of "war propaganda" or "war hysteria", referring to Russia's invasion as a special operation, a liberation operation or a conflict, as well as indicating that "war is a reaction" and a logical outcome. Analysing the publications, it is possible to conclude that after Russia's full-scale invasion, the main messages are "there is paranoia in Latvia," "NATO/USA are at war in Ukraine," and "Latvia's support for Ukraine is exaggerated," which overall contribute to the rationalization of aggressive actions.

2. Year 2023: "We" – those who know the truth/critics, "you" – sheep/supporters

The year 2023 began with floods in Jēkabpils, and in February, a draft law supporting the establishment of the National Defense Service was conceptually endorsed. There was also preparation for the Latvian presidential elections, which took place in May, and on 24 February 2023, it marked one year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These events have influenced social media publications; however, ongoing topics include Latvia's support for Ukraine, the Latvian government, media, and war. The publications reflect the theme of Russophobia, as well as discussions about the Latvian military.

In the analysed publications, a "we" *vs* "you" dichotomy is observed where "we" refers to a segment of society that (1) does not express support for Ukraine; (2) criticizes the government's work/requests the dismissal of the *Saeima*; (3) supports political parties that are in opposition or not in government; (4) advocates for the preservation of the Russian language in the Latvian information space; (5) defines themselves as defenders of the "ordinary" people; and (6) does not consume Latvian media. In contrast, "you" are (1) the Latvian government and its supporters; (2) members of society who express support for Ukraine; (3) those who oppose the preservation of the Russian language in the Latvian information space; (4) the US/NATO/EU; and (5) Latvian media.

Overall, the publications from 2023 show a pronounced "we" *vs* "you" division. Since 2022, this division has become much more pronounced and frequently mentioned in the analysed publications, consistently highlighting differences between groups of people, the government versus the public, and those who condemn *versus* those who do not condemn Russian occupation. There is a visible creation of a positive self-image, defining "we" as more intelligent, attributing critical thinking to "we" in contrast to "sheep" and "disinformation" consumers who "do not see the real situation", which is suggested to be visible outside Latvian media, such as in Russian media. There is also evidence of support for Russia and Belarus, as well as distrust and criticism of Latvian media, pointing to its alleged bias and disinformation. Overall, these publications reflect a dichotomy and societal division between supporters and critics on various issues, ranging from government performance to attitudes towards Russia and Belarus.

In 2023, political figures also utilized the message that Latvia is Russophobic and reinforced it. For example, Ainārs Šlesers, Aldis Gobzems, Valentīns Jermejevs, and Nils Ušakovs have made social media posts inciting hatred or dividing society. These posts are met with both support and condemnation directed at the Latvian government and parts of society engaged in this "incitement of hatred". Overall, the main disseminated messages contribute to undermining trust (in NATO, the EU, and the government), as well as rationalizing aggressive actions – asserting that support for Ukraine is exaggerated, that the Latvian government/media are incompetent, and that there is widespread Russophobia in Latvia.

3. Year 2024: "We" – misunderstood Russia's supporters, "you" – brainwashed hate inciters

In 2024, the year began with several significant events in Latvia: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit, changes were made to the Law on Public Electronic Media and Its governance, which will result in the merger of Latvia's public media, resignation of the former Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš to issues related to the use of special flights, preparation for the European Parliament elections and Tucker Carlson's interview with Vladimir Putin that gained significant media attention.

Analysing the definitions of "we" and "you" in the publications, a clear dichotomy emerges between supporters of Russia and those who support Ukraine. The contrast between "you" (the government) and the people ("we") is still apparent, with the latter being characterized as declining, impoverished, and suffering from the government's decisions and actions. The publications show a distinct division between individuals who align with Western/European values ("you") and those who do not support these values ("we"), with the latter group associating themselves with Russian culture and romanticizing the USSR. The publications emphasize a desire to align with Russian values and standards, while Western society is depicted as "deadly". Comparisons are used to differentiate between the two cultures and attitudes. "We" are often portrayed as opposing "hate speech" against Russians and Russian speakers perpetrated by "you" (the government). Overall, these publications reinforce societal divisions, promote nostalgia for the Soviet era, and foster support for Russian culture and values, in contrast to Western values.

According to the analysed publications, in the first three months of 2024, various propaganda messages are observed that use different argumentation and propaganda techniques to influence public opinion about the Latvian government, media, NATO, and relations with Russia. The publications spread unwarranted criticism and accusations against the Latvian government and media, labelling them as incompetent and corrupt. NATO is discredited by questioning its reliability and ability to protect Latvia in the event of an invasion. Accusations of Russophobia are employed, indicating that Latvia is dominated by an anti-Russian sentiment.

4. Expert interviews

Overall, the responses from experts confirmed the data obtained in the research section – there is a clear tendency in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war to spread propaganda messages that question the necessity of supporting Ukraine and demonize Ukrainians. These messages are coordinated and disseminated not only within Latvia. Long-term propaganda messages, which have been distributed since the restoration of Latvia's independence, remain unchanged – such as the distrust towards the Latvian government, the control of Latvia by the West, and other narratives that reinforce public scepticism towards the government and media. It is significant to note colonel Māris Tūtins observation that there is a segment of society in Latvia living in an alternative reality, with little connection to Latvia and its values. A clear division between two segments of society is evident. To mitigate the impact of propaganda, there is a need to educate society at all levels – starting with media literacy in the education system, beginning from preschool. Additionally, the responsibility of the European Union and decision-making institutions should be emphasized in reducing the spread of propaganda on social media, highlighting the need for stricter regulations for social media platforms controlled by actors from unfriendly countries.

Conclusions

In the contemporary world, information warfare has become an effective tool for geopolitical influence, combining elements of psychology, technology, and strategy to impact public opinion and political processes. In the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, the impact of information warfare extends beyond national borders, with Russia actively seeking to influence public opinion outside of Russia. One of the methods of information warfare today is the dissemination of propaganda through social media. The essence of the propaganda spread by Russia, both domestically and internationally, is a rejection of post-Soviet postmodernism. It aims at the complete destruction of the liberal concepts characteristic of Western societies – this includes democracy and its components, such as free media, fair elections, effective governance, and human rights to self-determination and self-governance. An increasing trend in Russian propaganda, also noted in this study, is the dissemination of messages that include real problems faced by Ukrainians, such as corruption.

In 2023 and 2024, the distinction between "we" and "you" is increasingly evident in discourse. The division has become more pronounced, continually highlighting differences between groups – between the government and the people, those who do not condemn the Russian occupation and those who do. A positive self-image is evident, with "we" being portrayed as more informed and critical, in contrast to the "sheep" and "consumers of misinformation" who "cannot see the real situation," which is supposedly visible outside Latvian media, such as in Russian media. "You" are often depicted as proponents of Western/European values, while "we" are associated with Russian culture, frequently romanticizing the Soviet era and openly expressing sympathies towards the Russian regime or Vladimir Putin.

Overall, these messages reinforce societal division and promote nostalgia for the Soviet era, as well as support for Russian culture and values in opposition to Western values. Russian actions are justified with the need for "denazification," pointing to the presence of Nazism in Latvia and Ukraine. Blame is sought, and individuals or groups are identified as responsible for the current situation. The theoretical literature also highlights that the hero/criminal and culprit/victim narrative is a massive manipulation that expands the aggressor's goals.

These messages and strategies foster a negative perception of the Latvian government, NATO, and relations with Russia, while promoting polarization in society and diminishing trust in national institutions and international organizations with which Latvia cooperates. The most frequently observed propaganda goal is to manage public opinion regarding the work and competence of the Latvian government, NATO support, and international organizations, as well as attempts to manipulate behaviour by encouraging the avoidance of Latvian media, learning Russian, and continuing to obtain information from Russian-language media.

Experts also point out that in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, there is a clear trend of spreading propaganda messages that question the need for support for Ukraine. There is mention of a segment of society that lives in an alternative reality, physically in Latvia but mentally in Russia.

To mitigate the impact of propaganda, comprehensive media literacy education is needed at all levels, including media literacy training from preschool. Additionally, stricter control and oversight by the European Union over social media platforms controlled by actors from unfriendly countries is necessary. Smaller-scale projects for combating disinformation should be designed to reach a broad audience, utilizing opinion leaders, influencers, and celebrities to convey simple messages across different audiences in non-traditional media.

In an era where anyone can become an "internet warrior", it is crucial to protect the information space just as Latvia safeguards its national borders – manipulation of public consciousness and opinions can have significant consequences for the country during critical events such as elections or referendums. Therefore, it is necessary to educate the public and for policymakers to adopt and implement laws and regulations that protect the country from attacks on our information space.

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.

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Manifestations of Securitization Elements in Latvia's Government Communication: Examples of COVID-19 and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract. The third decade of the 21st century brings new challenges, where society navigates in the shadow of unknowns and threats. With the COVID-19 pandemic in Latvia in 2020 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years later, Latvia's politicians and leadership have had to adopt a series of measures to normalise the situation, which inherently contradicted the established order and created constraints for people and the country's economy. The necessity of imposing restrictions also requires an explanation of the need for such a step. This paper seeks to examine how Latvian political actors attempted to implement securitization processes during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as at the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. By analysing the elements of the securitization process in the communication of political actors, it is concluded that the ambiguity and incoherence of the elements hindered the implementation of securitization process that should be accepted by the audience, which manifested itself both in the spread of the dramatic virus and in the inability to understand why Latvia had to give up the benefits and comforts of everyday life for another country. The research problem of the paper is related to the Latvian government's need to reach and persuade the population about the changes related to two major events – the COVID-19 risks and restrictions, as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The aim of the paper is to understand the creation dynamic of securitization move, first of all, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to assess whether the first period of Russia's full-scale invasion somehow follows up the established pattern.

Keywords: securitization, political communication, COVID-19, government communication

Introduction

Security is one of the keywords of modern communication – it is sometimes used instrumentally in attempt to gain public resources, because it increases the importance of the institutions that use the term, while applying the term usually yields greater results. It is employed to justify various types of reforms, restrictions or expenditure. Sometimes it is also introduced as an explanation, with a purpose to hide certain facts or information from the public. This may give the impression that the inclusion of any particular topic in the security domain can almost always guarantee its prominence (Polko 2020, 389). The founding fathers of the theory of securitization[1] in the so-called Copenhagen School offer their approach to safety. According to their perspective, securitization theory is concerned with how, when and with what consequences political actors frame something (anything) in the security dimension. The emphasis is on political language and the consequences that are produced on political agendas and political relations. Securitization implies that an "existential threat" is identified and a "speech act" prioritises an issue on the political agenda, legitimising extraordinary measures to deal with the threat, such as the use of force, invasion of privacy, etc. (Eriksson, Giacomello 2007).

The dynamics of each safety category are determined by the securitization actor and the reference object. The object is that which is at risk and at the same time must be preserved. Objects can be individuals or groups, e.g., refugees, ethnic minorities. Likewise, they can be areas of concern, such as the state, national sovereignty, ideology and the economy, which is considered a more traditional object (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 36). Actors in the securitization are those who perform the speech act. They can be political leaders, bureaucrats, government, lobbyists, pressure groups and others (Buzan *et al.* 1998, 40). By emphasising that the existence of the object is threatened, the securitization actor states that it is necessary to adopt extraordinary measures to ensure the survival of the object. This takes the issue out of the realm of normal politics and places it in the realm of emergency politics. Outside of normative politics, the problem can also be addressed outside the usual legal framework, which in turn also means that the problem no longer has its original meaning: it becomes what the securitization actor declares it to be (Taureck 2006, 55). It is important to gain the support of the public (audience) in the process of securitization. As Fred Vultee, a researcher at the University of Missouri-Columbia, has pointed out, safety is an intersubjective construct that shows that there is a shared agreement among people about what constitutes a safety threat (Vultee 2007). A speech act is defined as a discursive representation of a particular issue as an existential

1 The Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, at its meeting on 2 February 2016, considered the need for a Latvian equivalent of the term "securitisation" used in political science and decided to adopt the Latvian equivalent *drošībošana*.

threat to security. This means that by expressing an existential threat through language, they can convince the audience of an immediate danger (Emmers 2007, 113). The latter step involves breaking out of the rules, and the extraordinary methods should be appropriate to the scale of the potential threat.

A successful communicative act has several components – the communicator, the message, the *medium* and the audience (Campbell 1996). Natalie Frensley, a researcher at the University of Texas, and Nelson Michaud, a researcher at the University of Quebec, point out that the theory securitization treats the communicator, the message and the audience, ignoring the medium as an intermediary (Frensley, Michaud 2004).

Securitization theory assumes that security issues do not exist in themselves – they are the "fruits" of shared perceptions, which in turn are disseminated in the political environment. Williams argues that the social construction of security issues is analysed by examining the speech act of securitisation, through which threats are represented and acknowledged. This means that the problem is securitized and perceived as a security problem through these speech acts, which do not simply describe the existing security situation, but shape it by successfully representing it as such. Martin Shaw said that the media should be seen not only as a structure but also as an agent. Shaw's argument is important because it proposes –to fully understand the role of the media in legitimising the security process, it is necessary to consider not only the images they provide, but also their creation and production (Shaw 1996).

In order to conceptualize the process of securitization in the realm of political communication, Anastasija Tetarenko-Supe developed a model that encompass elements of securitization that are embedded into the mode of political communication where it is important to acknowledge not only actors, messages and the audience but also links that ensure the information flow and connections between the actors of securitization process (see Figure 1). This study

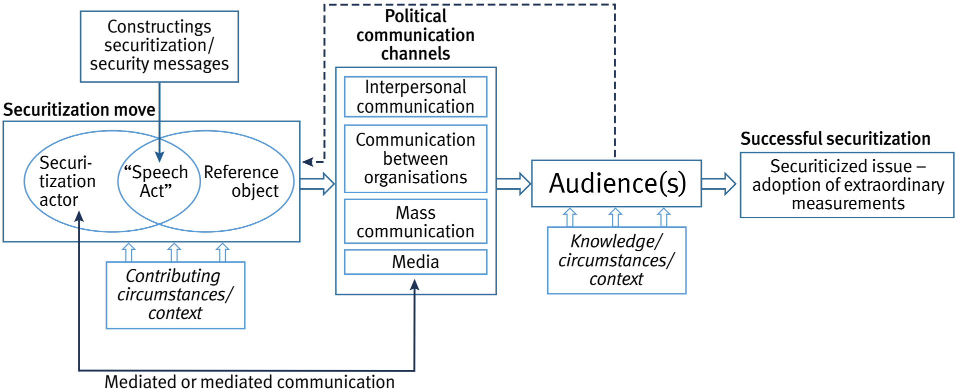

Figure 1. Framework of securitization (author: Tetarenko-Supe)

is dedicated to the securitisation move, aiming to establish whether political actors – the securitisation actors – have been able to explain to the audience through speech acts what is really at stake and why it is necessary to restrict the activities of everyday life.

Methodology

The data were analysed by content analysis, with a total of 3800 publications. In the case of COVID-19, three stages were distinguished. The first phase: emergency situation (12 March–9 June 2020); the second phase: autumn–winter 2020; the third phase: 6 July–21 October.

The study also used a representative survey of 1016 respondents, designed as part of the project research.

There are two research questions:

1. How did the Latvian government communicate and construct securitization process about COVID-19 crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine?
2. How do Latvian citizens evaluate the Latvian government's communication and solutions to the COVID-19 crisis?

Results

The results of the study point to a lack of consistency when political actors try to define the reference object of the securitization process – what is at stake and therefore to be defended.

In the first wave of COVID-19 (spring–summer 2020), the reference object emphasised by the government members, whose defence required extraordinary measures – sacrificing the economic momentum, restricting freedom of movement – was uniform. The threat to public health, to human life was emphasised in the public communications of politicians at the time. Thus, during that period, the underlying messages of securitization, substantiating why interference in democratic freedoms and free market economies was permissible, were linked to the need to protect human lives without questioning the value of this reference object in relation to other possible objects at risk. It is undeniable that COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 brought not only dangers but also unknowns, which in turn contributed to the success of the security measures adopted by the government. In the face of uncertainty, experts – medical, public health, authoritative and recognised international organisations – were put forward as opinion leaders, so that decisions were at least ostensibly based on expert advice. Given the different levels of public awareness of COVID-19, the diversity of sources of information used on a daily basis, and the political/ideological divide, a common voice across the political spectrum was also essential: in the face of an unknown virus, public health was, at least initially, emphasised as the reference object of the safety process by both the parties forming the government and those in opposition, as well as by their most prominent politicians. It can therefore be concluded that the focus of public communication by a wide range of political actors on a single object at risk identified by experts – public health – combined with the fear of the unknown, contributed to Latvia's successful overcoming of the COVID-19 wave number one. From a theoretical point of view, it can be argued that the Latvian government succeeded in implementing a process of securitization: having identified an existential threat, the COVID-19 virus, the government took extraordinary measures – declaring a state of emergency with restrictive elements on citizens' freedoms aimed at protecting a single reference object – public health. Given the low infection rates in the so-called first wave (spring–summer 2020), it can be assumed that the need for the audience's consent to the adoption of the plague, as predicted by theory, was also fulfilled.

Meanwhile, the second wave of COVID-19 (autumn–winter 2020) and the waves that follow, are largely characterised by the end of Latvia's success story in overcoming COVID-19, with Latvia facing anti-incidence records and leading EU positions. This undeniably acted as the contextual backdrop against which new processes of securitization were attempted in the context of containing the spread of COVID-19. The most important difference in the messages is the difficulty in identifying the object of reference or in saying what is really at stake and what should be defended.

Whereas in the first wave the reference object was public health, which could be preserved by variety of measures, including restriction of the economy, one of the elements of national development, in the second wave the entity that was previously subject to restriction or extraordinary measures (the economy) has itself been transformed into an alternative element, which, firstly, hinders the primary process of securitization and, secondly, serves as an alternative object of reference, which must also be protected without restrictions, which can be considered as an extraordinary measure during the course of the spread of a dangerous and lethal virus.

While in the first phase the securitization messages, in terms of the adoption of extraordinary measures, are mainly based on the need to protect public health, in the second phase the securitization actors both drive the safety process and in parallel offer a potential step backwards, to be achieved by the public complying with the measures imposed so far, thus seemingly motivating the public to accept the changes proposed by the government in order to get rid of them sooner. This, in turn, suggests that the government understands that the public is not satisfied with the restrictions and will only tolerate them for the greater good. This points to the need for the government to clearly define this "greater good", but this is a significant problem in the second and subsequent waves of COVID-19.

Moreover, with the need to re-declare a state of emergency, the government contradicted itself with its initial statements that the actors would not do so. Thus, it could have given the impression of a failure to fully anticipate scenarios, or of concealing such possibilities from the public.

The government has been forced to take the step of securitization in a cyclical manner because the overarching goal of the securitization process – public health – is not being achieved, and the range of extraordinary measures is being extended with each successive pass. The primary securitization move is influenced by individual interests competing with the public interest: by proposing blanket restrictions, sectors try to justify their exceptional position, which, given the range of people involved, also acts as a questioning of the securitization message. In addition to the two reference objects mentioned above, the reference object "democratic values", which flourished later, also begins to develop.

The subsequent waves of the COVID-19 pandemic mark the interplay between political actors in a situation where the epidemiological situation is deteriorating significantly, but where what has been done so far is no longer enough. Unlike the first phase, which emphasised unity of purpose, the subsequent phase clearly marks the inability of political actors to acknowledge even collective mistakes without looking for individual culprits. There is a difference here, however: while representatives of the political actors – the government – tend to look for individual culprits, the economic sectors as well as experts tend to look at what is happening from different perspectives, blaming the government as a whole. This phase also marks the political profiling in the context of COVID-19, when ministers of the respective parties were basically concerned only with their own sector, without looking at the broader context of the situation.

In contrast to the first phase, which emphasised the role of experts in decision-making, the second and subsequent phases mark a departure from this position, and this is evident among both political actors and economic agents. In an attempt to remain open for business, industries promoted mistrust of safety requirements and restrictions proposed by experts, arguing that the proposed or accepted restrictions were disproportionate or counterproductive. Similarly, politicians' statements and calls have been contrary to what they themselves have endorsed. Alongside this, there is also a growing fragmentation of society, with the emergence of a new dividing line: belief in the dangers of COVID-19.

It can be said that the changes in the content of the public communication of political actors, or their inability to implement the act of securitization, are also largely linked to Latvia's actual performance in overcoming COVID-19. The more coherent and inclusive the message across the political spectrum, the relatively better Latvia's infectology data have been.

Although the study confirms that Latvia's poor epidemiological indicators have gone hand in hand with chaotic government communication, the survey shows that people generally want to hear all the existing views and reject the idea of silencing different views when the government communicates about solutions to the crisis. According to the survey conducted during the project, the majority, or 66.5% of the Latvian population, disagrees that the government should not allow dissenting views to be heard, but instead the government should communicate as a whole on crisis solutions. 1/3 of respondents would like to see a united communication. There is almost the same division on the question of whether the communication of solutions should conceal differences of opinion among ministers.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 in Latvian government communications painted a picture similar to that of the first phase of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 in terms of cohesive and operational information transfer. Government representatives acted proactively within their respective sectors, strongly advocated support for Ukraine, expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people, and highlighted the values associated with democracy, such as freedom, independence, and unity, which do not give rise to doubt or controversy. The difficulty, as in COVID-19, was to (un)realise these and other values in the face of disagreement, resistance, including again political disagreement. A similar problem that the country faced in going deeper into the COVID-19 pandemic is also being experienced in the context of the war, with the state unable to find a sufficiently clear rationale why the population should give up tourism, goods, income and other benefits that it has received so far in Russia and Belarus.

Conclusions

Each emergency event may highlight different potential issues, but the key principles in the public sphere – cognitive, emotional and informational resilience – are the same. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of effective public communication to convince the population of the validity of the restrictions to be put in place. In the light of the above, it can be concluded that clear, unambiguous and expert communication by governments can contribute to the success of the policies to be implemented. According to the elaboration probability model, the public can process information in two ways: centrally or peripherally. Assuming that government issues affect everyone and that individuals are interested in the topic, they process information centrally and are persuaded by evidence and reasoned positions. (Perloff 2017, 340). The COVID-19 pandemic proved that citizens are willing to temporarily abandon their routines in the face of danger, given a rational and reasoned explanation of why and for what purpose. Given the complex [geo]political situation and the various challenges that require a departure from the normative patterns of behaviour, crisis communication and communication in a crisis involving security threats and the involvement of the whole society must be implemented with a focus on a clear benefit-loss narrative, i.e., what is at stake and what is the cost to protect it. Understanding the economic situation of the population, the problems related to the reduction of people's earning potential, the communication should be considered with particular care, clearly indicating and making it clear that the refusal to respect any economic constraints, no matter how painful, is incomparable to other losses that the State has identified as a reference in the security process.

Given the high level of distrust in politicians, the communicative activity of anti-establishment actors must be adequately assessed, taking into account the information flows in other bubbles in their communication with the public. When thinking about reaching and listening to citizens, opinion leaders from different groups should be identified who have the potential to reach a specific target audience. For example, the vaccination campaign carried out by the Vaccination Bureau, which involved well-known opinion leaders in society, raised doubts as to whether there was an understanding at national level of who were the people that certain demographic groups listen to, so that certain groups were effectively ignored in the campaign (Russian speakers, young people, etc.).

Although the adoption of mayorships of a different nature and scale outside the normative politics is a political decision, it should be based in the communication with the public on a considered analysis and expertise of the situation and/or on a clear statement of personal/political responsibility in case of a different decision.

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Potential Risks and Benefits for Content Production after Merger of Latvian Public Service Media in 2025

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to investigate the possible risks and benefits of content production after the merger of Latvian public service media. The theoretical approaches of the work include the concept of public value, the concept of diversity in the media environment, the concept of media ecosystem, systems theory, organisational inertia theory and diffusion of innovations theory. The research methodology includes four research methods, two of which were used for data collection (semi-structured interview and survey) and the others for data analysis (content analysis and SWOT analysis). A total of 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with public service media content creators, media experts, reformers, and decision makers, thus eliciting what they perceived to be the risks and benefits of a merged public service media. The study also sought the views of company employees regarding the need for, and the foreseeable risks and benefits of, a media merger by analysing the results of a survey of 128 public service media employees. A total of 34 major risks and 17 major opportunities for content production after the merger were identified using a SWOT analysis. This means that potential risks are anticipated more than opportunities. Based on the data, it is concluded that several interviewees and survey participants consider that all possible risks and benefits are not sufficiently weighed up in the decision to merge the media. Furthermore, it has been found that there are different perspectives on how people at management level and content creators view potential risks and benefits.

Keywords: public service media, public service media mergers, organisational change, Latvian Radio, Latvian Television, Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP)

Introduction

Since the establishment of the Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP) in 2021 (LSM.lv Ziņu redakcija 2021), there have been ongoing discussions regarding the merger of Latvia's public service media, which are legally composed of two state-owned limited liability companies – Latvian Television (LTV) and Latvian Radio (LR). Although attempts to merge these public broadcasters date back more than a decade, discussions on media reform have intensified over the past four years. This is largely due to a provision in the transitional regulations of the Public Electronic Mass Media Law, which mandates that within six months of the council's establishment, it must submit a concept to the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee of the *Saeima* regarding the formation and operation of a unified public electronic media organization (Sabiedrisko elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome 2022, 4).

Although the transitional regulations did not explicitly require the Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP) to implement the merger of public service media, significant efforts have been made to advance this reform. The initiative gained a definite momentum on 18 January 2024, when the *Saeima*, in its final reading, approved the creation of a unified public broadcaster by 2025 (Sabiedrisko elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome 2024), despite public opposition from Latvian Radio employees (LSM.lv Ziņu redakcija, Kincis 2023). At that time, the SEPLP expressed satisfaction with the *Saeima's* historic decision (Sabiedrisko elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome 2024), emphasizing that these changes would be monumental, impacting not only public media employees but also the entire Latvian media ecosystem.

The research problem is that the merger of public service media will entail significant changes affecting several hundred employees, the content production process, and Latvia's media ecosystem as a whole. Major changes can introduce substantial risks, which may or may not be justified. The aim of the study is to examine the potential risks and benefits in content production following the merger of Latvia's public service media.

To this end, five research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the potential risks in content production when merging public service media?
2. What are the potential benefits in content production when merging public service media?
3. Do the identified risks and benefits differ between management-level individuals and public service media employees, and if so, how?
4. Are there more potential benefits than risks?
5. To what extent are the risks and benefits in content production, identified in this study, recognized by those responsible for the reform?

Methodology

In the study the author employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data collection involved two distinct research methods: semi-structured interviews and a survey. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in two blocks. In the first block, individuals responsible for the reform, its implementers, and content experts from public media were interviewed, while the second block focused on content creators from public media. Each interview block was prepared with its own set of questions. Some questions in both blocks were similar. The first block consisted of a total of 21 questions, whereas the second block contained 27 questions. The questions were designed to explore four aspects: attitudes toward the merger of public media, the progress of the merger process, the impact of the reform on public media content following the merger, and future forecasts after the merger of public media. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted, ranging in length from 21 minutes to one hour and 14 minutes.

In the first interview block, seven individuals were interviewed: Jānis Siksnis, Chairman of the SEPLP; Ieva Aile, Board Member of Latvian Radio responsible for program and service development; Ivars Priede, Chairman of the Board of Latvian Television; Anita Brauna, Chief Editor of Latvian Radio; Sigita Roķe, Chief Editor of Latvian Television; Anda Rožukalne, the Ombudsman for Public Media and Leila Rasima, Chair of the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee of the *Saeima*.

In the second interview block, eight individuals were interviewed: Zane Eniņa, Editor of the News Department at Latvian Radio; Dagnija Neimane-Vēvere, Editor of the News Department at Latvian Television; Marta Cerava, Chief Editor of LSM.lv; Agita Bērziņa, Chief Editor of LR1; Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga, Content Editor for news, informational documentaries, and sports programs at Latvian Television; Renāte Lazdiņa, Head of the Latgale Studio at Latvian Radio; Anna Stroja, Chief Editor of LR4 and Jekaterina Kolosova, Head and Chief Editor of the Russian-language content section at Rus.LSM.lv.

A survey was also used as a data collection method. The survey consisted of 12 closed-ended questions with provided answer options. It was compiled and distributed electronically. A total of 128 employees from Latvian public media completed the survey, including 89 employees from Latvian Radio and 39 from Latvian Television. It should be noted that employees from the LSM.lv portal were not separately identified, as the first question of the survey was: “Which of the companies do you work for?” The term “companies” referred to the public service limited liability companies – Latvian Radio and Latvian Television. The LSM.lv portal is legally integrated into Latvian Television, so any employees from the portal participating in the survey would have to select the response option “Latvian Television”. The author is unable to determine how many employees from LSM.lv participated in the survey, as it was conducted anonymously. The decision to distribute an anonymous survey was made to ensure that public media employees could provide honest responses regarding the necessity of the merger of public media.

The second part of the study consisted of data processing. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The content analysis included seven categories. This method allows for the differentiation of various types of potential risks and benefits post-merger, including those directly related to content production as well as those that are secondary. Additionally, this research method helps to identify potential risks and benefits associated with internal changes within the organization – risks and benefits that could potentially jeopardize the implementation of the reforms.

The data obtained from the survey is automatically compiled, as the author created the electronic survey on the internet platform VisiDati.lv. The platform aggregates the collected data and also provides the results in *Microsoft Office Excel* format. The author accumulates and visualizes this data for subsequent analysis.

The data obtained from qualitative content analysis is compared and summarized. Additionally, the data is mutually compared and analysed by examining the survey results of public media employees alongside the results of the interviews, assessing whether the opinions of media employees differ from those of reform leaders and media experts, as well as the perspectives of content creators (mid-level managers). Using the SWOT analysis method, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to content production following the merger of public service media are consolidated. Strengths and opportunities are considered benefits, while weaknesses and threats are regarded as risks. Strengths and weaknesses are more reflective of the current situation, and theory suggests that they can be mitigated, whereas opportunities and threats represent future scenarios that are less subject to influence. Given that the public media reform is based on both internal and external factors, the author constructs the SWOT analysis matrix not by focusing on aspects that can or cannot be mitigated, but rather on risks and benefits that are related to the current situation and future projections.

Results

By compiling the results of the SWOT analysis categories, it can be concluded that the merger of public service media is projected to yield a total of 17 significant opportunities and 34 substantial risks. Thus, the risks associated with content creation could potentially be twice as numerous. However, it is important to note that eight possible risks and benefits were not included in these figures, as they could be considered both benefits and threats from various perspectives and in terms of execution.

The 17 significant opportunities in content creation are divided into two levels – primary and secondary. According to the author's assessment, primary opportunities are deemed the most significant, while secondary opportunities are considered less important. In total, eight of the most significant opportunities and nine lesser opportunities were identified. For instance, the support for the reform at the management level is viewed as less critical than the backing from LTV employees, as the management level is numerically smaller than the staff. Moreover, the new unified media will have a new board and a single chief editor, with the composition of the SEPLP being re-elected, suggesting that the management level is less stable than the employees, who hold their positions indefinitely. The support of employees for the merger of public service media is crucial, especially since many of them are content creators. If content creators are merged into a single media entity against their wishes, it could significantly impact the quality of the content.

Among the most significant benefits identified are: a stronger media organization, enhancement of regional content, overall content development, journalists focusing on more complex content creation, an increase in investigative and analytical content within public media, timely content distribution, and growth in user numbers. Additionally, other significant but somewhat less critical benefits include: opportunities for broader representation of correspondents abroad, specialization of journalists by field, creation of new formats, easier content accessibility, distribution of content across various platforms, technological advancement, improvement of children's and youth content, and synergy between LTV and LR employees in content creation.

In total, 34 potential risks associated with content creation in the merged media have been identified, categorized into two distinct parts on the basis of their significance: primary and secondary levels. The 17 most critical risks are primarily related to the reform process. These include inadequate management of changes, unclear and insufficient communication regarding the changes, lack of employee motivation to engage in the changes, uncertainty about the future, the perception of the merger as unsuccessful, difficulties in reaching compromises, insufficient explanation of the reform's objectives, and scepticism among some public media employees about whether the reform would be implemented or successful. Risks related to the change process are particularly significant, as they determine the success and development potential of content creation in the merged public media. Other identified critical risks, which are partially subordinate to the reform process, include the reluctance of LR employees to support the changes, as well as interviewees and survey respondents believing that all potential risks and benefits have not been adequately assessed. This raises concerns that the reform might not be successfully implemented.

The author's SWOT analysis also identified additional significant risks: extended decision-making and approval processes, unclear future funding, clashes of organizational cultures, challenges in maintaining editorial independence, the potential for employee turnover, decreased diversity of opinions in the merged media content, and a projection that the risks would outweigh the benefits as a result of the reform.

Among the identified potential risks, 17 less significant risks were noted: the media management model may not be similar to that of neighbouring countries, difficulties in development due to the reform, a generally negative assessment of the merger process, employees believing that the merger will not promote content growth or diversity. It was also determined that among these risks is a partial understanding among employees regarding the merger's objectives, a perceived lack of consideration for each media outlet's specificity, the potential loss of the uniqueness of radio and television, and concerns that the LR and LTV brands may be at risk of being lost.

Greater cybersecurity and overall security risks are not considered among the most significant risks, as the credibility of these aspects would need to be confirmed by competent security authorities; however, these risks cannot be entirely dismissed. Similarly, there are concerns that opponents of public media may exploit the reform to undermine the media's credibility. This category also includes risks related to competition, predictions of unequal salaries, increased workload for the Editorial Council, and various risks associated with the new board and chief editor positions.

Conclusions

In total, several potential risks and benefits associated with content creation following the media reform were identified, among which 34 significant risks and 17 major opportunities were determined.

By analysing the responses from the semi-structured interviews, the author concludes that the potential risks and benefits differ between individuals at the management level and those working in public media. At the management level, the risks and benefits primarily related to public media content (management-related risks and benefits) were articulated. In contrast, public media employees were able to forecast more risks and benefits that were directly associated with media content creation.

Based on the obtained research data, it is concluded that several interviewees and survey participants believe that when deciding on the media merger, all potential risks and benefits have not been sufficiently weighed. This leads the author to the impression that those responsible for the reform have not fully recognized all the risks and opportunities.

The most significant risks and benefits in content creation are based on the opinions of the interviewees and survey participants regarding the change process. The author concludes that the reform has not been managed successfully enough so far, and there is a lack of clear communication about it, leading to a sense of uncertainty among employees. This uncertainty could manifest as an inability to accept changes and even result in employees leaving the media, which would have a significant impact on the content creation of the merged media outlet. Moreover, the decision to leave important issues unresolved for the new board, which has not yet been established, is viewed negatively. Consequently, the entire responsibility is expected from individuals who have not yet begun their work.

In the study, the author concludes that the employees of Latvian Radio perceive the changes the most negatively, while those at Latvian Television predominantly support the reform. According to the theory of organizational inertia, it is more challenging to implement changes in older companies or those where changes occur less frequently. Since LR is an older organization than LTV, this theory applies. Through semi-structured interviews, the author found that LTV employees are less engaged and interested in the media merger compared to their LR counterparts. This may suggest that LR employees have a better understanding of the potential risks associated with content creation, leading them to express a more negative attitude toward the reform.

The author also concludes that the public media reform will not only bring fundamental changes to the landscape of Latvian public media but, furthermore, will impact the diversity of the entire Latvian media environment. For instance, the merged media could increase competition among commercial media, compelling private media outlets to further develop their content. Conversely, the competition could become so fierce that some media companies may cease operations altogether. Summarizing the findings of the study, it can be concluded that both positive and potentially negative impacts will arise from the reform. However, predicting the exact nature of these effects is challenging, as it largely depends on how the merger is implemented and executed.

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 Klinta Ločmele.

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Homeschooling. Attitude of Latvian Journalists Towards Inclusion of Mobile Technology in Their Daily Work

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Abstract. In the contemporary era, mobile technologies have become an essential aspect of daily existence. These technologies, encompassing digital and mobile platforms, permeate the everyday lives of a significant portion of the citizenry. Statistics indicate that in 2023, approximately 93.1% of households had access to the Internet. It is important to note that these technologies serve not only as tools for entertainment and communication, but also possess the potential to be utilized for professional endeavours. It is widely believed that the use of mobile technologies constitutes an integral part of the practices deemed essential for a journalist. For instance, journalists may employ mobile phones to record interviews, report from the scene of events, capture video footage, and take photographs. Additionally, smartphones provide access to the Internet, enabling journalists to acquire knowledge, generate ideas, and create live text broadcasts. However, a pertinent question arises: to what extent have media editorials embraced these technologies? Furthermore, is there a systematized approach to the introduction and utilization of modern technologies within the media landscape? This report presents an analysis of preliminary data obtained from a survey conducted among Latvian journalists and media students at the end of 2023. The survey was conducted as part of the project titled "Mobile Journalism: Practice and Education in Central and Eastern Europe". Researchers from the University of Latvia's Social Science Faculty collaborated with other universities in the region to investigate the use of mobile technologies and the challenges encountered by journalists in Europe in their work and daily lives. The survey data were compared to the findings on an in depth interview with eight journalists and editors from national and regional Latvian media outlets. They reveal a generally positive attitude to learning and using technologies in their work. The largest challenges are the ability to learn to use them and time needed to acquire new skills.

Keywords: mobile journalism, mobile technologies, convergence, multimedia journalism

Introduction

The historical development of mass media, news media, and journalism has been inextricably connected to the evolution of technology (Pavlik 2001, 3–5). Although the profession of journalism, as we understand it today, did not exist at the time of the printing press's invention, one can trace the historical development of information technologies, news gathering, and dissemination. Conboy (2004, 9) notes that the first known news pamphlet, which has survived the passage of time, was printed and distributed in 1513. This pamphlet recounted the events of a significant battle and was accompanied by a woodcut illustration. Subsequently, more elaborate descriptions of events gained popularity and demand. Conboy (2004, 15) writes: "News was increasingly being traded as a commodity".

As witnessed by the progression from the printing press and humanity's ability to produce and reproduce text more rapidly to the development of the Internet and various other modern technologies, journalists must embrace these technologies not only because they facilitate various aspects of their work but also due to changing audience demands and requirements. The need for online news media grew as people began to use computers, the Internet, and mobile devices connected to the Internet. At this juncture, there is no doubt that, at least in Latvia, online new media has surpassed and outperformed printed press and, in some ways, even television and radio (Krūtaine, Tetarenko-Supe 2024). One of the most significant changes has been brought about by the aforementioned mobile devices, both from the perspective of audience expectations and the journalist's role in creating news stories (Salzmann *et al.* 2023, 346–347).

However, the question arises as to how journalists perceive the ever-evolving technological landscape that imposes new requirements upon them. Journalists now possess the ability to record interviews, photograph the subjects of their own stories, and even live stream developing events. Although modern technology companies have endeavoured to make these functions as user-friendly as possible, they still necessitate certain skills and understanding from the journalist. For instance, taking a high-quality photograph still requires the photographer to possess a fundamental understanding of how light and shadows affect the image, as well as some knowledge of framing. Consequently, for a journalist specializing in writing, taking photographs represents a new skill that must be acquired. Conversely, newsrooms may not feel the need to employ professional photographers if journalists can multitask. Thus, there may be multiple points of friction between journalists, editors, publishers, and audiences, each with their own wants, needs, and agendas.

Previously, there have not been any studies in Latvia that specifically focus on the attitudes of journalists toward mobile journalism and the use of mobile tools in fulfilling their work assignments. This pilot study examines the relationship between news media and journalists and utilizes two unpublished data sets to outline attitudes and identify questions that should be addressed in a larger study. The report analyses initial data from a survey of Latvian journalists and media students, conducted in late 2023 as part of the project "Mobile Journalism: Practice and Education in Central and Eastern Europe". In this project, researchers from Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia collaborate with other universities in the region to explore the use of mobile technologies and the challenges they pose in the work and daily lives of journalists in Europe. The other data set consists of a series of eight in-depth interviews with media professionals and journalists with more than 25 years of experience working in their respective fields. These interviews were conducted in the summer of 2020.

Technology and journalism

Progress of technology has given many tools to journalists to use when compared even to situation 10 or 20 years ago. The smartphones have given was abilities or recording and accessing information as well as given tools for disseminating it. At the same time there are many factors that should be considered when talking about mobile journalism. This can be viewed from the perspective of media convergence (Deuze 2004, 142). By using mobile technologies journalistic profession expands while at the same time converges with other professions as well as with the audiences.

Initially, the term "convergence" was employed to describe the blurring of boundaries between different communication forms within the context of emerging, technologically-driven media. Early research in this area primarily focused on the innovation and development of media technologies themselves (Xiong, Zhang 2018). Meanwhile, over the time is has gained a wider definition and now looks at various cultural, technological and communicative aspects, all of which in the era of digital media have changed the ways how media rooms work, produce content and interact with audiences. (Menke *et al.* 2018).

In this study, the focus is on the technological aspect, as the mobile technologies offer a powerful tool that, as mentioned can facilitate convergence of various news media roles into one person. For example, by using a phone, a reporter can capture information for purposes of writing a news story, and, moreover, take pictures that will be printed or posted with a news story. Journalists can also be publishers of their own work – using mobile device to post images, videos, sound and text online. Smartphones these days even offer the ability to edit video or sound files without the need of a computer. Emerging AI technologies are now offering even more abilities.

Multimedia journalism, mobile journalism, digital journalism, and other types of journalism are different lenses with which researchers can analyse the impact, influences, effects of modern technology on media professionals. In the context of this study, multimedia journalism is understood as media scholar Mark Deuze described – as the presentation of a news story package on a website using two or more media formats; secondly, as the integrated (although not necessarily simultaneous) presentation of a news story package through different media, such as (but not limited to) a website e-mail, SMS and other types and formats of news communication to audiences (Deuze 2004, 140). In the 16 years since Deuze wrote of multimedia journalism, in the principle of the matter nothing has changed, while regarding the technological aspect, the ways a journalist can tell a story have multiplied. Almost any journalist these days has a smartphone, either their personal or work-supplied, provided that they can and sometimes are expected to use it to make calls or record interviews, and create engaging social media content. Furthermore, as the data discussed later discussed shows – the journalists and journalism students understand and even embrace the need for multimedia journalism that can be accessed by using mobile technologies.

There are other factors that affect the mass media and journalistic profession (Örnebring 2010; Kim, Kim 2018), such as economic development. Even in the 1640s news pamphlet printing enabled by previous centuries adapted and improved Gutenberg press was seen as an opportunity for economic gains (Conboy 2004, 31). Additional information grew increasingly critical in business decisions and therefore it became more valuable and with the invention of electricity the news and fast transmission of the news became critical to companies all over the world (Min 2022, 5). Smaller regional newspapers and magazines cannot afford a social media manager, as even the salaries for the employees are not satisfactory (Šulmane, Uzule 2018, 93). So here the convergence is also driven by the economic factors.

It must be noted that "journalists in general seem to view technology and technological development as inevitable, impersonal forces that directly cause many of the changes taking place within journalism," as written by media scholar Henrik Örnebring (2010, 58), describing how media professionals often will revert to technological determinism when explaining the changes that occur in media and affect their profession. That is echoed by the media researcher Seong Jae Min (2022, 1–5), who notes that sometimes technological effects by journalists and scholars alike are overestimated. He refers to a quote of futurist Roy Amara, stating that people "tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run." Min explains that initially people are overexcited in positive and also negative ways about the technology, then, as time goes on, they notice flaws and problems, become disappointed with it, while in time the technologies become interwoven in the society. As such, the mobile technologies that are at the centre of this study, have become a part of general society, as well as the daily tool bag of journalists (Salzmann *et al.* 2023, 347).

Nonetheless, the rise of mobile journalism, powered by smartphones, has transformed the journalistic landscape. The ability to capture, access, and disseminate information on the go has expanded the scope of journalistic practice. However, this shift also brings challenges, including the need to adapt to new storytelling formats and navigate the complexities of an increasingly converged media environment. The omnipresence of smartphones in journalism underscores the need for continuous learning and adaptation to fully harness the potential of mobile technologies for news production and audience engagement.

Attitude towards mobile journalism in Latvia

The survey was conducted in November–December of 2023. It gathered responses about mobile journalism, acceptance of this technology and attitudes towards mobile journalism from practising journalists, journalism students and academics who teach communication science students that aspire to be journalists. The project is helmed by the scholars from University of Bucharest and it aims to study more experiences and attitudes from more than 20 Central and East European states, under the title "Mobile Journalism Practice and Education in Central-East European Countries".

The study was in some ways limited, and in total 100 responses were gathered that were deemed to be valid, and the survey was fully completed. While is not a sufficiently large sample size to yield definite answers and descriptions of journalists and journalism students' attitudes about mobile journalism, there are certainly a few findings that are interesting enough to be pursued in further, more in-depth studies.

One of the findings shows that more than 80% of respondents in each of the groups agreed that mobile journalism should be a part of education curriculum for journalism students. In the student group around 53% agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, while in the journalist group more than 75% agreed or strongly agreed. 76% of journalists agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that mobile journalism skills are vital for journalists in training, and around 75.5% of students agreed and 77% of academics agreed with this statement.

These two datasets suggest that, while further studies should provide more scrutinised results, validated by other research methods, nevertheless, the fact emerges that all the interested parties see mobile journalism as a valid and essential part of modern journalism. The journalists who practise their craft day by day might see how acquiring mobile journalism skills might help the new journalists. Furthermore, there is a broad agreement from academics who teach this trade, as well as the students of this specialty.

The next question – "Have you personally attended master classes, workshops or lectures about mobile journalism?" introduced some more tension, as the majority of groups responded with "no". The second most popular answer was that the respondents had acquired the skills through self-training. That signals a problem, which should be explored in further studies – what are barriers and obstacles for students and journalists, as well as academicians to participate in the mobile journalism classes. There might be multiple factors – lack of time, lack of possibilities (such classes might not be offered/available), they might not see the need for formal education when it can be acquired by doing it on their own (as many survey participants noted), or by learning from social media videos and articles. As this mobile technology is very present and easily accessible there might be some bias in the words the need to learn about it, as it might seem "too easy" or "too simple" or maybe intuitive enough that it does not require special learning time.

The next question concerning journalism – "Has the workplace provided masterclasses or any possibilities to learn?" shed some light on one of the possible explanations, namely – there was not a systemic approach. 63% or journalists say that their workplace has not provided workshops or classes. 23% say they do not know if there has been this possibility. That means that more than 85% of professionals have not had the opportunity to learn about using the mobile journalism tools.

These questions form the broader questionnaire that casts light upon a potential problem in the academic and professional sphere of journalism and learning about the mobile journalism tools.

The second part of this pilot study is composed of eight in-depth interviews conducted in 2020 with journalists and editors from various national and regional media. The journalists and their positions in media in 2020 were: Pauls Raudseps (editor and part-owner of a weekly investigative journal *Ir*), Juris Tihonovs (foreign news editor for the national daily newspaper *Diena*), Linda Rasa (editor-in-chief for daily national newspaper *Latvijas Avīze*), Ingus Bērziņš (editor-in-chief for online news website *Delfi*), Ināra Egle (political correspondent for daily national newspaper *Latvijas Avīze*), Egita Jonāne (journalist for *Latgales Laiks*), Regīna Tamane (editor-in-chief for the regional newspaper *Auseklis*), and Anita Rozentāle (editor-in-chief for the regional newspaper *Bauskas Dzīve*).

The interview subjects were journalists with over 20 years of work experience. All of the interviewees are in the age group from 45 to 60 and most of their professional careers have been dedicated to work in Latvian media as reporters and editors. Most started when Latvia regained independence in 1991. The decision to include journalists with at least 20 or more years of experience was conscious and deliberate. These are the journalists who have experienced various types of media production and creation technologies – starting from the analogue printing press and using typewriters. At the same time, professional photographers are sent out to get pictures, all the way to modern cloud-based article writing and editing systems. The partially structured interview method enabled conducting a search for correlation in the data and possibly offering some explanations to the questions from the survey.

The interviews partly reveal the converging of roles. Interviews with regional journalist Egita Jonāne from a newspaper *Latgales Laiks* demonstrated a practice that is common in small, local Latvian media – an average journalist does not only write and report, but they take pictures and sometimes even help as proofreaders. Journalists for the newspaper generate content for the website, as well. The journalist remembers when *Latgales Laiks* had a staff photographer, now it is considered too expensive. Similar stories come from other regional outlets. The same adoption of multiple roles can be observed in national media. While larger national news websites, newspapers, magazines still employ staff photographers or have contracts with agencies or freelancers, nevertheless, there are times when a journalist has to take photos or film videos.

Meanwhile, it transpired that journalists generally agree with this order of things – they do not expect a producer or a photographer to accompany them everywhere. Some even suggested that travelling with a multimedia content creator was cumbersome. It is not uncommon for journalists specialising in investigative journalism to document everything they encounter by taking photos, filming, or recording audio materials. Only television journalists still enjoy the cameraman as a companion. Other media-type employees embark on investigative endeavours on their own.

In an interview, an editor-in-chief of the regional daily newspaper *Dzirkstele* Regīna Tamane admits that every one of the reporters "just tries to do their best" and, in her estimate, "usually that is enough". She concedes that the main reason for not having staff multimedia people is money. However, when asked a hypothetical question – if money were not an issue, would you hire one – after a moment of consideration admits that she probably would not. She does not think that there would be enough work that would justify hiring a professional photographer.

This sentiment does not echo throughout the Latvian media environment – journalist and editor from Daugavpils website and a printed daily newspaper talked with regret about not having sufficient financial resources to have multimedia content creators. The earliest of the Daugavpils daily *Latgales Laiks* journalists, Egita Jonāne, as previously mentioned, talked fondly about the past when photographers accompanied journalists. This also can be gleaned from the open-ended questions in the survey. 34% of the respondents believe that there should be a greater financial support for hiring multimedia content creators.

Nevertheless, journalists and editors generally seem to have a pragmatic outlook when talking about monetary issues. They do not want additional spending on technological solutions, even if they would make their job a little easier. A co-founder, columnist and editor of the weekly magazine *Ir* and an editor of the bi-monthly journal *Ir Nauda* Pauls Raudseps, when asked about the usefulness of the software for streamlining the article writing, editing, and delivering to print, dismissed the idea, saying that for a weekly magazine with a small team it was not needed, while admitting that daily newspapers could benefit from it.

In interviews, editors and journalists adopt a distinctly positive viewpoint when discussing the general influence of digital technologies. The senior foreign news editor for the daily newspaper *Diena* Juris Tihonovs thinks that technologies can make journalism shallow. However, he does not see it as a requirement or a logical development that embraces digital technologies and online journalism. He states that journalists have complete access to information, data, and sources, and superficial reporting is rather caused by laziness. He thinks that technologies are wonderful compared to the time when he set out professionally, when most of the printed press still relied on typewriters and printing press technologies, whilst the first few computers and computer-assisted printing energed only in the early 1990s. Other interviewed editors agreed –technology did not inherently facilitate or breed "bad journalism". It resonated with an older survey conducted in 2016, which found that 78% of the surveyed journalists felt that the battles for audiences decreased the general quality of reporting (Rožukalne, 2020). Nonetheless, the overall sentiment was positive. Those who have worked in the field for more than 20 years say that technologies, especially mobile phones and the internet, have greatly empowered journalists. Survey reveals that journalists often like to have these tools at hand, as they allow them to document the events better, and even if the resulting material is not for publishing, it helps them recall things and write or talk about them.

Interviews with older journalists revealed that the "learning as you go" attitude had been around since the 1990s. As journalists have always been busy most of the time, developing new skills and practices has been and still remains on their own shoulders. Rarely does anyone recall any special classes or master courses. Some editors acknowledge that there have been opportunities, but there has not been enough time for journalists to participate. Usually, the skills to use modern technology solutions have been acquired by doing it and using the technology. This has remained true to this day.

While journalists admit that they have no formal training in creating content, editors sometimes see their staff's lack of skill as a problem – less than half of journalists have attended classes, and those who have, admitted that they do not have the time to immerse themselves in them fully. Meanwhile, as the financial situation is not improving and the technology is more accessible, journalists are thrust into multimedia journalism without the necessary training. This has the potential to bring down the appeal of a final product and thus possibly turn audiences elsewhere.

Conclusions

While this is not a comprehensive study and more data must be collected, the findings signal a couple of important observations that should be worthwhile avenues for further studies.

The survey data, coupled with insights from in-depth interviews, paints a complex picture of the Latvian journalistic landscape in relation to mobile journalism and convergence. While there is a clear recognition of the importance of mobile technologies and a general willingness to embrace them, the practical implementation and skill development remain the areas of concern. The lack of formal training opportunities and systemic support for mobile journalism highlights a potential gap between the theoretical understanding of its importance and the practical realities of its integration into daily journalistic practices. The convergence of roles, particularly in smaller regional media outlets, further underscores the need for comprehensive training and support to ensure that journalists can effectively navigate the multifaceted demands of the digital age.

The findings of this pilot study suggest that while Latvian journalists and journalism students are generally optimistic about the potential of mobile journalism and convergence, there are significant challenges that need to be addressed. The lack of formal training opportunities, coupled with the pressure to produce multimedia content, highlights the need for a more proactive approach to skill development and resource allocation within the industry. Future research should delve deeper into these issues, exploring the barriers to mobile journalism adoption and identifying strategies to facilitate a smoother transition towards a fully converged newsroom culture. The future of journalism in Latvia, as elsewhere, hinges on the ability of journalists and media organizations to adapt to the ever-evolving technological landscape and harness the power of mobile journalism to tell compelling stories and engage with audiences in meaningful ways.

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Attempts to Create a New Tradition: 9 May 2024 in Riga and Daugavpils

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Abstract. The article discusses the celebration of the Soviet Union's victory in the Great Patriotic War in Latvia on 9 May 2024. The Parliament of Latvia adopted a law "On the Prohibition against Organisation of Specific Public Events on 9 May" on 20 April 2023. This marked the end of the grand celebrations of Soviet Victory Day in public squares and streets of cities and the beginning of new celebration practices. The article presents observations made by researchers in Victory Park, Ivan's Cemetery, Matīss Cemetery, and Rainis Cemetery in Riga, as well as in Slavas Square and Dubrovins Park in Daugavpils on 9 May 2024. The researchers' observations allow to conclude that a transformation of the celebration of the Soviet Union's victory in the Great Patriotic War on 9 May has taken place in the Latvian public space. The abandonment of the celebration of 9 May is ensured by the active work of state security structures, therefore the celebration does not take place openly. Soviet military cemeteries became the main place to celebrate 9 May in the larger cities of Latvia'. Soviet Victory Day is still a major holiday for a large part of the Latvian population, especially Russian-speaking ones. However, the celebration of 9 May in Latvia has declined significantly. The practices of celebrating the Soviet Union's victory in the Great Patriotic War are in a transitional stage.

Keywords: 9 May, Soviet Victory Day, celebration, Victory Park in Riga, Dubrovins Park in Daugavpils, Soviet military cemeteries

Introduction

The Soviet Union and Russian Federation consistently celebrated its victory in the Great Patriotic War on 9 May. In Latvia, such celebrations were ended in 2023, because Parliament (the *Saeima*) adopted a law on 20 April of that year to prohibit the organisation of specific public events on 9 May. Outdoor entertainment and celebratory events were banned throughout Latvia, as were meetings, marches and picket lines. The use of fireworks was banned throughout 9 May and until 7:00 AM of 10 May. The goals of this law included the need to defend state and public safety interests by banning disorder so as to protect public health and morality; to keep anyone from scorning or endangering Latvia as a democratic nation-state and its values, attempting to split society, to praise war, military aggression, totalitarianism and violence, as well as to alter the meaning of historical events; and to demonstrate solidarity with the people of Ukraine, whose sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity have been endangered by Russian military aggression, also commemorating those who have suffered or perished during the war. The law took effect on 27 April 2023 (*Saeima* 2023).

Despite the ban, there were attempts to celebrate 9 May in Latvia. The National Police registered nearly 100 violations of the law, detained 30 people, and launched four criminal proceedings related to justification of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as one criminal procedure on the scorning of the Latvian flag as a symbol of the state. The largest number of violations was registered in Riga and Daugavpils, less – in Kurzeme and Zemgale. People commemorated the day by laying flowers at the locations where Soviet monuments once stood. Victory Park in Riga was one such location. Others visited places where Soviet soldiers were buried and decorated them with banned symbols of Russia's military aggression, including the Order of George, as well as the letters "Z" and "V," which praise Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The police found some people who were blaring music to praise military aggression from their automobiles. Others had the flag of the Russian Federation affixed to their vehicles. In other cases, there were more minor violations such as petty hooliganism, violation of rules on fireworks, the use of alcoholic beverages or narcotics publicly, being present in a public place while intoxicated, failure to obey the lawful requests of officials, hindering the work of officials, etc. (Delfi 2023).

In advance of 9 May 2024, there were various public reminders of the ban against celebrations, warning that law enforcement and security institutions in

Latvia were preparing very seriously for the event (LETA 2024a). People were only allowed to lay down flowers at places of burials. Generally speaking, from the perspective of law enforcement, the day passed peacefully. 65 protocols were issued on administrative violations in relation to the celebration of the Soviet victory in Latvia. 19 people were detained, and one person was charged with the illegal use of fireworks, particularly when it was discovered that the person also had narcotics on his person. Interior Minister Rihards Kozlovskis praised Latvia's law enforcement institutions for a job well done. The minister added that also of use was the timely dissemination of media information about how Latvia was banning praise of the former Soviet Union, its symbols and its war crimes, and also that law enforcement institutions were carefully preparing to monitor events on that day (Valsts policija 2024; LETA 2024b).

The number of people who gather to celebrate Russia's victory in the Great Patriotic War has been shrinking in recent years. The apex was between 2005 and 2014, when Russia first invaded Ukrainian territory (Ločmele *et al.* 2011a, 123–128; Ločmele *et al.* 2011, 258–266; Zelče 2018a, 402–417; Zelče 2018b, 138–141). Surveys have regularly been conducted on the question of whether the "date of victory over Nazi Germany on 9 May" should be commemorated in Latvia. 41.3% agreed or mostly agreed with the thought in March, 2024. There were distinct differences among respondents from families in which Latvian is spoken and those in which Russian is spoken. 21.8% among the former group supported the celebrations, while in the latter group 73.2% did so (Valsts kanceleja 2024). It must also be noted that 9 May also represents Europe Day, and there are always lots of diverse events in honour of this fact. 53.8% of the respondents in the aforementioned survey declared Europe Day to be worthy of commemoration.

The goal of this research is to examine changes in people's attitudes toward the celebration of the Soviet Union's victory on 9 May and toward its various traditions, as well as to examine the main habits of celebrants in 2024.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Celebrations and rituals are always part of a specific place and time. They are constantly "invented" or "re-invented" in support of social cohesion, a desire to establish and legitimate institutions and authorities of power, to strengthen social order, as well as to train people in terms of value systems and conventions of behaviour (Hobsbawm 1983, 9). Celebrations and rituals are an important component in public order in that they strengthen public solidarity. According to Durkheim (2001, 322), "no society can exist that does not feel the need at regular intervals to sustain and reaffirm the collective feelings and ideas that constitute its unity and its personality."

Most nation-states have their own symbols such as flags, anthems, state emblems and national holidays. These are standard elements which are officially recognised, clearly defined and enshrined in legal acts. These national symbols can be fully or partly replaced or changed when political systems or leadership change. In the case of system change, normal transformation of societies can involve a restoration of old symbols to give them new meaning. The creation of new rituals and symbols and the awarding of new meaning involves a removal and disappearance of old rituals and symbols. When it comes to such transitory situations, "the result is a double symbolic life, the old and the new, when either of the different groups of people celebrate different occasions" (Mach 1993, 107–108). Some people take part in nationally recognised celebrations, while others remain stuck in the past, where there is opposition to official national celebrations. There are those who take part in official rituals, while others favour opposition. The aim of national political symbols is to create an image of the nation's unity under the leadership of the state, as well as to affirm that the whole nation supports their country's supreme values, including independent, sovereignty, historical mission and social order. Support for such symbols confirms the specific individual's loyalty toward the country even if the person is not fully satisfied with his or her life therein (Mach 1993, 110). An understanding of the experience of how celebrations and rituals emerge and are transformed is of importance when examining the relationship between the people of Latvia and the complex practice of celebrating the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War on 9 May.

Researchers who were involved in the study of May 9, 2024, conducted observations in several places where people in the past used to gather together to celebrate the Soviet victory and to commemorate the victims of World War II. The locations were Victory Park, Matīss Cemetery, Ivan's Cemetery and Rainis Cemetery in Riga, as well as Slavas (Glory) Square and Dubrovins Park in Daugavpils. Photos and videos were taken as part of the proceedings.

Results

The review of results involves a concentrated description of the main ideas from observations on 9 May 2024.

Riga

Victory Park. Until 25 August 2023, Victory Park contained a monument to the Soviet Latvia and Riga liberators from the fascist German invaders. The monument served as the main location where people in Latvia gathered to celebrate the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War. Fundamental restructuring of the park began in the summer of 2023. An artificial lake was installed with well-appointed banks and small bridges. A path was created for skiing and roller skating, along with pedestrian walkways with tunnels, as well as playgrounds for children. New trees and decorative bushes were planted in the park, as were new flowerbeds. On 9 May 2024, the park and its elements were very different from the park which used to host grandiose celebrations and the mass laying down of flowers.

On 9 May 2024, there were at least two police officers at every entrance to Victory Park, while others patrolled on streets and bridges. They made sure that no one brought flowers or candles into the park. The police worked in good harmony, using walkie-talkies to converse with one another. If someone suspicious turned up, officers alerted one another. As soon as someone was seen carrying flowers, the police approached the person and expelled him or her from the park.

The police told researchers that all day long they had to talk to people who really did want to lay down flowers in the place where the Soviet monument had once stood. The researchers observed five such cases between 4:00 and 6:00 PM. Some of the people were aggressive and screamed at officers who told them that they were no longer allowed to lay down flowers at the site. Yet others tried to conceal flowers under their clothing so as to avoid the ban. There were two women in the park who inflated red balloons and then strolled around, filming the park while they were doing so (Figure 1). The weather was chilly, but lots of people were sitting on wooden benches near the body of water that was in the lake (Figure 2). The day at Victory Park passed calmly thanks to the alertness of the police officers, and the Soviet victory was not celebrated at all.

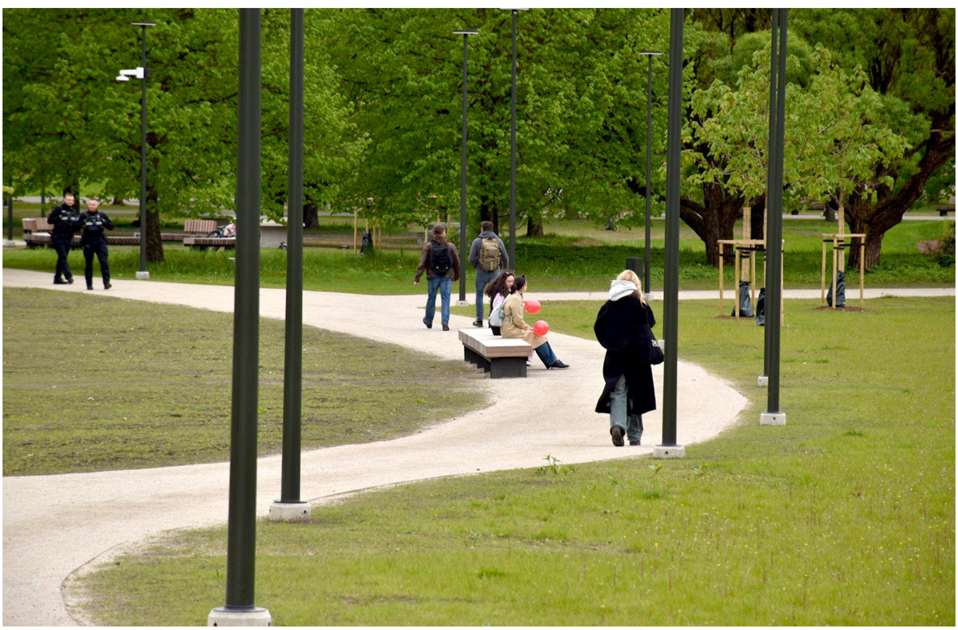
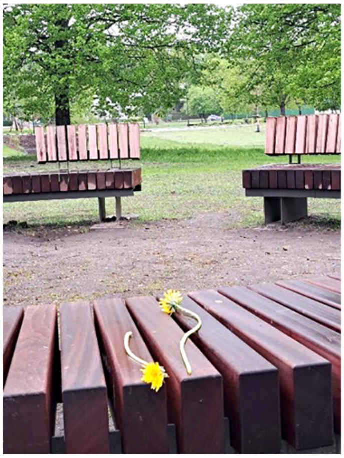


Figure 1. Two women holding red balloons in Victory Park on the 9 May.
Pictures by Evelīna Kukarela

Figure 2. A man sat in the place where the monument once stood in Victory Park on 9 May. He would later walk out of the park with flowers. Pictures by Evelīna Kukarela



Figures 3 and 4. Victory Park in the early morning of 10 May.
Pictures by Laura Ardava-Āboliņa

In the early morning of 10 May, researchers were conducting a repeated observation in the Victory Park. The park was perfectly clean and peaceful. There was no evidence that anyone would try to violate the newly established order (Figure 3 and 4). It may be interpreted as a coincidence, but there were only two dandelion flowers lying on the park bench.

Ivan's Cemetery for the Orthodox and Old Believers. This cemetery is located in the Latgale Suburb of Riga, and some of those interred there are Soviet troops who died during World War II and fell during a battle with Nazi German troops in June 1941. Approximately 150 men were buried in the Orthodox segment of the cemetery, while some 800 were interred with Old Believers. Observations on May 9 found that there were lots of people in the area of the graveyard encompassing the graves of the military, with flowers being laid down on monuments and on gravesites (Figure 5 and 6).

Figures 5 and 6. Soviet military cemetery at Ivan's Cemetery on the evening of 9 May. Pictures by Evelīna Kukarela

One woman told researchers that she knew people who invited others to come and lay down flowers at this specific ceremony in protest of the fact that the monument in Victory Park had been dismantled. This was perceived as an alternative. Transferring the commemorative activities to the cemetery finally puts the remembrance, not the celebration at the centre of the ritual. People at Ivan's Cemetery represented various age groups. Most were rather quiet, and there were no loud conversations, though researchers did see a few people at the cemetery who were obviously intoxicated.

Matīss Cemetery is located in the Latgale Suburb of Riga, and it, too, has graves of Soviet soldiers. Observations were made twice on 9 May, once – in the morning, the second time – in the evening. In both cases, few people were spotted at the cemetery – just two during the morning. Their behaviour made it clear that these were people who positioned themselves as supervisors of the graves of Soviet troops and the laying down of flowers in the cemetery. There were lots of flowers at the cemetery, most of them red (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Soviet military cemetery at Matīss Cemetery on the evening of 9 May.
Pictures by Vita Zelče

Rainis Cemetery is in the Northern District of Riga. During the Soviet occupation, this was an elite cemetery, and several dozen high-ranking Soviet military officers who lived in the Latvian SSR are buried there. Most of these graves are very near the memorial of Rainis. Right after World War II, 33 Soviet officers and guerrillas were buried at the cemetery, among them Imants Sudmalis and Otomārs Oškalns, who were both Heroes of the Soviet Union. During previous years, on 8–9 May, people placed red flowers (mostly carnations) on the gravesites. There were no fewer flowers in 2024. Only a single flower was placed on the graves of some soldiers, particularly those who perished in 1945, which was the last year of World War II. Other graves were very ornate. Observations and conversations with people at Rainis Cemetery suggest that family members of the deceased military personnel were responsible for the decorations. Comparatively more flowers were on graves with gravestones that included Soviet symbols, such as the flag, the hero's star of the Soviet Union, or Soviet weapons. Another person buried at the cemetery is Latvia's most famous female sniper, Monika Meikšāne, who served in the 43rd Guards Latvian Rifle Division. Her grave did not have a single flower upon it on 9 May. That is presumably because her gravestone did not indicate that she was part of the Soviet military and did very well

Figure 8. The grave of Otomārs Oškalns at Rainis Cemetery on 10 May. Picture by Vita Zelče

Figure 9. The grave of Monika Meikšāne at Rainis Cemetery on 10 May. Picture by Vita Zelče

during the Great Patriotic War (Figure 9). This fact suggests that the laying of flowers at Rainis Cemetery was more of an automatic process than a purposeful commemorative event.

Daugavpils

Slavas Square. This square dates back to 1969, and it is near the city centre of Daugavpils. The monument to Soviet troops that was part of the square was dismantled on 31 October 2022. Observations were conducted on the morning of 9 May, when there were lots of police officers in the square. The mood was calm. Some people simply crossed the square, including the place where the dismantled monument had once stood (Figure 10). There were a few exceptions. A woman stood in the place where the memorial had been and demonstratively wept. Someone else had brought along a woman in a wheelchair. The woman got out of the chair and stood at the place where the monument had been for some period of time. Both people refused a request from researchers to explain what they were doing. The man was very aggressive, yelled that he did not want to be videotaped, and tried to expel researchers from the square with the help of the police. The observers saw no one placing flowers at the location where the dismantled monument had been or anywhere else in the Slavas Square.

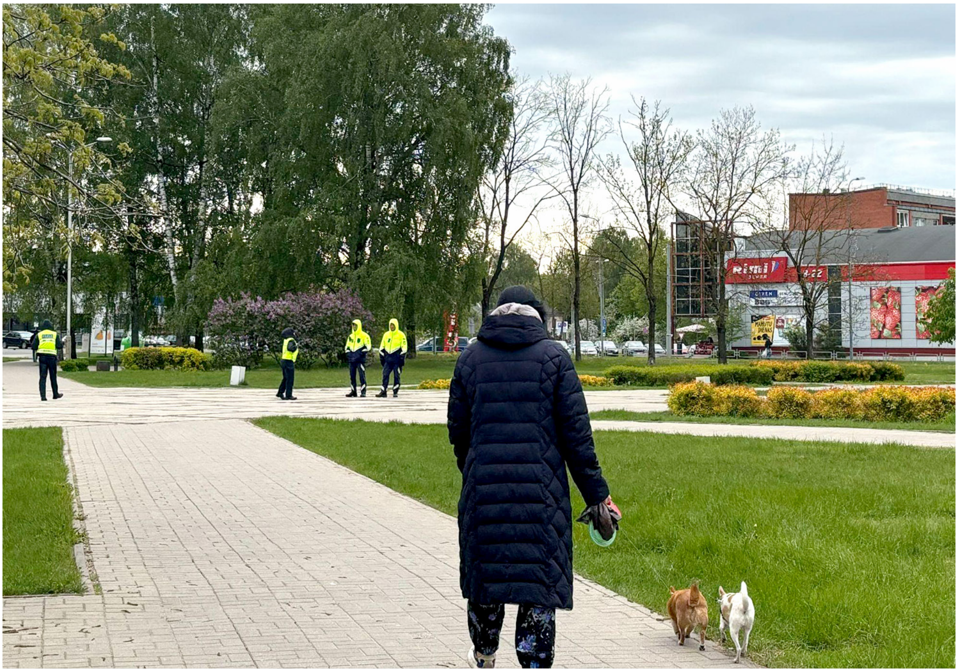


Figure 10. Slavas Square on the morning of 9 May. Picture by Anželika Litvinoviča

Dubrovins Park is located in the city centre of Daugavpils. Four Soviet soldiers, including three major-generals were buried in the park in 1944, and a temporary monument was installed above their graves. Three more soldiers were buried in the park in 1949 – the men whose remains had originally been interred in other nearby cemeteries. Sculptor Oļegs Zakamennijs produced the monument for the park. On 27 July 1984, in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Daugavpils being taken over by the Soviets, a new monument dedicated to the Great Patriotic War was unveiled. It was made of black marble, produced by sculptor Vladimir Ivanov, adorned with an eternal flame. The soldiers who had been buried there were reinterred before the monument was mounted, but in August, 1998, as sewage lines were being reconstructed, it was found that there were still six graves of Soviet troops in the park. The reburial of 1984 proved to be incomplete, and only one soldier was reinterred in the city's military cemetery. After expert autopsies of the remains, the militarists were reinterred in a joint grave in the park alongside the 1984 monument in September, 1998. In 2022, when there was a mass dismantling of monuments which marked the Soviet occupation or praised its militarism, the Soviet memorial in Dubrovins Park remained in place, because soldiers were buried at its foot (Chaikina 2015). Hence, it was not on a list of Soviet and Nazi monuments that was prepared for dismantling by the Cabinet of Ministers on 14 July 2022 (Ministru kabinets 2022).

Figure 11. Police officers in Dubrovins Park at noon of 9 May. Pictures by Anželika Litvinoviča

Researchers observed Dubrovins Park from 11:00 AM until noon on 9 May. There were many police officers who conversed amongst themselves in Latvian, mostly without the dialect that was typical of Daugavpils (Figure 11). This suggested that the police had arrived from other parts of Latvia. Few policemen that researchers communicated with confirmed this fact. There were comparatively many people in Dubrovins Park on 9 May, most of whom lay down flowers at the monument and then went on about their business (Figure 12). Many met friends or relatives and greeted one another on the "Victory Day festival". Some people complained about the police, particularly when officers started to remove ribbons with text in Russian from the wreaths that had been placed on the monument. There were inscriptions saying "we will never forget", "great holiday", "Russian society" and others. Some people said that they felt sorry for the police officers because "they had to do such dishonourable work". Others claimed that life was much better in the past, when there were no restrictions on celebrating 9 May.

Most of the people at Dubrovins Park were 40 or older, many of them – of retirement age. There were a few children or adolescents who were there with their parents to lay down flowers at the memorial. Many people who approached the monument made the sign of the cross. People interviewed by researchers mostly said that 9 May was an enormously important and even holy day for them.

Figure 12. Visitors to Dubrovins Park at noon of 9 May. Picture by Anželika Litvinoviča

Asked about the war in Ukraine, most interviewees said that they saw no links between the war and 9 May. They refused to answer when asked which side they supported in the conflict, though some declared that they were "for peace in the world". No one at Dubrovins Park expressed clear support for Ukraine, yet nobody, except for one man, openly praised Russia. The single supporter parroted narratives from Russia about history and against Ukraine. The man claimed that Zelensky cares nothing about his people, and if he wanted peace, then he would have to talk to "Vladimir Vladimirovich". This man at Dubrovins Park had nothing but scorn toward Zelensky and Joe Biden. A woman intervened, asking the man to quieten down, while also demanding that the researchers turn off their camera. The man was later arrested by the police, because in addition to praising Putin and scorning Ukraine, he was drinking alcohol.

Most people avoided the researchers and did not want to answer questions. Some were aggressive when a question was posed, including a young man who declared that he would break the researchers' camera if he was filmed. The conclusion was that people have learned to keep silent and avoid any expression of their views. Still, the large number of people at Dubrovins Park and the number of flowers that were laid down at the memorial show that people express their attitudes toward 9 May with deeds, but also with public silence.

Conclusions

The researchers who were involved in the project on 9 May 2024, found that the public celebration of the Soviet Union's victory in the Great Patriotic War on 9 May has been transformed. The celebrations have gone underground. Security structures in Latvia engage in preventive activities to preclude any celebrations, there are lots of police officers at locations where the celebrations were held in the past, and they are well-organised and responsible in carrying out their work duties there.

Still, people who consider 9 May to be a day for commemoration have come up with new practices. Most of them gather and lay down flowers at Soviet military cemeteries which were all but empty in previous years, when 9 May was celebrated actively at Soviet monuments in city squares or parks. Information also suggests that gatherings at military cemeteries occurred in larger cities in Latvia, where there are lots of Russian speakers and where there are Soviet military cemeteries that are easily reached. No one visited military cemeteries in rural areas in which most residents are Latvians and which are difficult to access (far away from major population centres, alongside unpaved roads, etc.).

Observations in Daugavpils showed that many urban people consider 9 May to be a day for celebration and are prepared to observe it publicly, albeit in a different way. Commemorations are no longer organised by local government entities, political parties or non-governmental organisations in line with a pre-announced even programme. In 2024, the celebrations were individual or in small social groups. In some cases, celebrants organised themselves on an *ad hoc* basis.

Celebrations of 9 May have disappeared to a substantial extent in Latvia. Commemoration of the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War has become transitional. There are still people who celebrate 9 May and consider that to be a matter of values. Some of the former celebrants have ceased taking part in public events related to the date because they observe the laws of Latvia and understand their neccessity in the current geopolitical situation.

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Gender Aspect in Communication of 2024 European Parliament Elections: Analysis of Pre-Election Communication of Political Party *Progresīvie* on Social Media Platform *Instagram*

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Abstract. This study explores the gender aspect of communication in the 2024 European Parliament elections through the analysis of the pre-election campaign of the Latvian political party *Progresīvie* on *Instagram*. The research is topical due to the growing importance of social media in political communication and the underrepresentation of women in politics. The aim of the study is to evaluate how a political party committed to gender equality communicates its candidates and how this communication resonates with the audience. The study employs quantitative content analysis to systematically assess 59 *Instagram* posts published by *Progresīvie* from 13 February to 7 June 2024. Posts focusing on the party's lead candidate, Elīna Pinto, and the second-placed candidate, Mārtiņš Staķis, were analysed for themes, engagement metrics, and adherence to gender stereotypes. Results indicate that despite the party's commitment to gender equality, the communication strategy did not fully highlight Elina Pinto's leadership, as the posts featuring Mārtiņš Staķis garnered a significantly higher engagement. Topics addressed in Pinto's posts moved away from traditional "feminine" themes, emphasizing leadership and professional expertise. However, Staķis's communication leaned on traditionally "masculine" topics such as defence and security, reaffirming his established political persona. Posts portraying both candidates together showed a neutral gender representation but did not elevate Pinto's position as a leader. The study concludes that avoiding traditional gender stereotypes and focusing on leadership did not significantly enhance Pinto's visibility or voter appeal. The findings underline the challenges female politicians face in overcoming entrenched biases, even within gender-progressive parties, highlighting the need for more targeted and assertive communication strategies to achieve equitable representation.

Keywords: European Parliament, gender, gender stereotypes in politics, *Instagram*, political party, political campaign, social media

Introduction

Since Latvia joined the European Union in 2004, there have been five European Parliament (EP) elections – in 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024. The share of female candidates and elected MEPs in these elections has varied over time. In the first EP elections held in Latvia in 2004, a total of 245 candidates stood for election, less than 30% of whom were women. In these elections, 2 of the 9 MEPs elected were women (Statistikas portāls 2018).

The gender ratio of MEPs elected in the following elections remained unchanged:

- 186 people stood as candidates in the 2009 EP elections, 3 of the 8 elected were women (Statistikas portāls 2018);
- 170 people stood as candidates in the 2014 EP elections, 3 of the 8 elected were women (Statistikas portāls 2018).
- 246 people stood as candidates in the 2019 EP elections, 3 of the 8 elected were women (Centrālā vēlēšanu komisija 2019, 275).

271 people stood as candidates for the 2024 EP elections. Almost 40% of the candidates were women, the highest ever (Spakovska 2024). For example, in the party *Progresīvie* women made up 66.7% of the candidates, in *Saskaņa* – 55.6%, and in *Latvija Pirmajā Vietā* – also 55.6%. However, in the first places of the lists, where candidates have a better chance of being elected, the share of women was lower – only 25% of the first places were occupied by women. Of the 9 elected MEPs, 1 was a woman – Sandra Kalniete from *Jaunā Vienotība* (Centrālā vēlēšanu komisija 2024).[1] Thus, despite the increase in the number of female candidates, the number of elected female MPs in 2024 decreased.

Although the representation of women in the lists of candidates is increasing, this is not always reflected in the number of elected MEPs. This could be due to the lower positioning of women on the lists, voters' preferences and the communication of the election campaigns.

This study focuses on the analysis of the EP election campaign by the party *Progresīvie* on *Instagram*. *Progresīvie* have been chosen for several reasons. First of all, it is the only political party in power in Latvia with gender quotas in its statutes. Paragraph 4.3 of the statutes states that a gender balance must be ensured on the party's board, i.e. no gender should be represented more than 60% or less than 40%. This requirement also applies to other Party bodies, such as the Audit Commission and the Ethics Committee (Progresīvie). The approach reflects the party's commitment to gender equality and to ensuring balanced representation in its structures. Secondly, the party has nominated a woman politician, Elīna Pinto, as its leader for the 2024 EP elections. Thirdly, voters

1 Two female MEPs continue to work in the European Parliament: after Valdis Dombrovskis was confirmed as Trade Commissioner, he was replaced by Inese Vaidere.

elected the second-placed candidate, Mārtiņš Staķis, to the EP. Taking into account all the above-mentioned circumstances, this case is worth exploring: how a gender-oriented political force communicates its political candidates and what is the user reactions to this communication.

Politics has historically been "a field created by men for men, making it easier for them to navigate" (Sullivan 2023, 884). This tradition is rooted in the historical association of men with publicity and women with privacy, establishing a hierarchical superiority of men over women. Despite women making up roughly half of the global population, they remain underrepresented in both national parliaments and governments worldwide (UN Women 2023). This underrepresentation perpetuates gender inequalities and reinforces hierarchical power structures in society, resulting in an imbalance in political decision-making and the exclusion of female perspectives (Magin *et al.* 2024, 158).

Social media offers female politicians an opportunity to challenge these longstanding inequalities. Unlike traditional media, which often portrays women in politics through a stereotypical lens or gives them less attention overall, social media provides a platform for women to bypass these biases and directly engage with voters. According to Van der Pas and Aaldering, traditional media's biased portrayal of female politicians and the lack of coverage they receive can have serious electoral consequences, as reduced visibility often correlates with fewer votes (Van der Pas, Aaldering 2020).

By leveraging social media, female candidates can take control of their narratives and increase their visibility, thus countering the systemic disadvantages they face in traditional media.

In modern political campaigns, social media has become a pivotal tool for engaging with voters and disseminating information. As described, "campaign information is characterized as a one-way communication practice that aims to share knowledge about the candidate's election activities such as endorsements, advertisements, campaign meetings, speeches, or discussions with voters" (Tsichla *et al.* 2021, 2921). However, the landscape of political discourse has shifted significantly, moving beyond traditional media. "Contemporary political discourse is not restricted to traditional media channels but is becoming even more prominent in the socially networked space of new media. Voters are increasingly keen to search for political information in the online context" (Tsichla *et al.* 2021, 2919).

Over the past two decades, digital media – including social media – has transformed into an essential component of political communication. Politicians have recognized the unique potential of social media to bypass traditional gatekeeping functions. According to Tsichla *et al.*, "politicians realized the astounding potential of social media, which allows them to bypass the media's gatekeeping function and control the message projected to the electorate, gain visibility, mobilize, engage, and nurture a two-way relationship with voters" (Tsichla *et al.* 2021, 2919). This is especially significant, as "voters rarely encounter politicians in real life, and their perceptions and evaluations of politicians likely stem from their media portrayals. Social media not only promises established, nationally known top politicians the opportunity to cultivate their image and disseminate their views, but also offers local politicians a channel for self-promotion" (Geise *et al.* 2024, 2).

Social media also empowers politicians to manage their public image. Unlike traditional news media, where influence over portrayal is limited, social platforms enable strategic self-presentation. As explained by Magin *et al.*, "politicians have only limited influence on their portrayal in the news, but on social media, they can decide themselves on their self-presentation. Thus, they can strategically either bypass or enforce gender stereotypes" (Magin *et al.* 2024, 158).

Among social media platforms, *Instagram* has gained particular significance in political campaigns due to its younger user base: "*Instagram* has younger users than Facebook, which makes it attractive in election campaigning for reaching age groups that are more difficult to reach via more traditional communication channels" (Magin *et al.* 2024, 163). As a visual-centric platform, *Instagram* serves as a strategic tool for image enhancement and direct engagement with target audiences. Uluçay and Melek emphasize its importance, stating that, "as the most popular image-centric platform, *Instagram* has become a strategic tool for enhancing leaders' self-images and directly addressing target groups. Likewise, leaders' self-framing tactics on *Instagram* influence voters' impressions of them" (Uluçay, Melek 2024, 143).

Ultimately, social media has revolutionized the way political campaigns are conducted, offering opportunities for personalization, visibility, and engagement that were previously unattainable through traditional media.

Men and women exhibit distinct patterns in their social media behaviour, which also influences their engagement with political content. As Tsichla and other researchers have observed, "although men are more likely to express their political opinions on social media, women tend to respond to public messages and like content more often" (Tsichla *et al.* 2021, 2919). This difference highlights the varying ways individuals interact with political messages and suggests gendered preferences in social media usage.

In the context of political campaigns, male and female politicians often adapt their strategies to align with gender-congruent traits and issues. According to Tsichla *et al.*, "several studies support the idea that male and female politicians align their campaign strategies with gender-congruent traits and issues" (Tsichla *et al.* 2021, 2923). These approaches not only reflect societal expectations but also demonstrate how gender shapes communication styles in political contexts.

Traditional media have long been criticized for providing less coverage to female politicians, creating challenges for women seeking visibility in political discourse. Research consistently highlights the gender bias in traditional media's coverage of elections. Female candidates are less visible and are often portrayed differently than their male counterparts. However, social media offers an opportunity for women to bypass these biases, enabling them to take control of their public image and communicate directly with voters (Holm *et al.* 2023, 134). This possibility is especially critical in combating stereotypes that undermine women's perceived competence and leadership abilities.

Gender stereotypes significantly influence perceptions of leadership and political success, often creating unequal starting conditions for women in the political sphere. The traditional image of a successful politician aligns closely with traits typically associated with masculinity, such as dominance, power, independence, strength, and activity. Conversely, femininity is often linked to traits like obedience, dependence, anxiety, passivity, and softness – the qualities considered contrary to effective leadership (Williams, Best 1990; Magin *et al.* 2024, 159). This dynamic results in a political environment "in which masculine values and political values are often interchangeable" (Meeks, Domke 2016, 896).

Gender stereotypes extend beyond media representation, influencing campaign strategies and voter expectations. These stereotypes also affect voters' perceptions of issue expertise: masculine traits are associated with competency in areas like the economy, foreign affairs, and defence, whereas feminine traits are linked to healthcare, education, and social welfare (Huddy, Terkildsen 1993; Tsichla *et al.* 2021, 2922).

"Male" issues, such as business, military, and taxes, are often considered more societally important, both by voters and news media, resulting in greater visibility and larger budgets for these areas. In contrast, "female" issues, such as education, family, and healthcare, are frequently viewed as secondary, which further entrenches gender-based disparities in political influence and leadership perceptions (Magin *et al.* 2024, 162; Brands *et al.* 2021, 2017).

In conclusion, female politicians must navigate a complex interplay of stereotypes and expectations, balancing traditionally masculine traits required for leadership with the feminine qualities expected by voters. While social media offers new avenues for challenging these norms, the persistence of gender stereotypes continues to shape political landscapes and leadership perceptions.

Methodology

The study uses the method of content analysis to evaluate the pre-election communication of the political party *Progresīvie* on the social media platform *Instagram*.

Quantitative content analysis is an empirical method for the systematic analysis of audio, textual, visual and/or audiovisual media content. The aim of such analysis is to show trends in media content reporting rather than to gain an absolute understanding of a particular media message (Rose 2005, 54–56). Content analysis categorizes elements of a text to create datasets that allow researchers to interpret patterns and infer meaning. The method is versatile and can be applied in both qualitative and quantitative research, helping researchers uncover underlying themes, patterns, or relationships in communication (White, Marsh 2006). This makes it particularly useful in fields such as media studies, sociology, and psychology.

The essence of content analysis lies in its ability to transform qualitative data into measurable quantitative insights. Through the systematic application of coding schemes, researchers identify themes, concepts, or recurring elements within a dataset. This allows for the interpretation of textual or visual material in a structured and reproducible manner (Hsieh, Shannon 2005). The combination of qualitative insights and quantitative data enhances the credibility and depth of the analysis.

The process of conducting content analysis involves several essential steps. First, the researcher formulates a clear research question that defines the scope and purpose of the study. Second, the sampling frame is determined, ensuring that the selected materials accurately represent the research topic. Next, a coding scheme is developed, which includes defining categories and units of analysis. Coders are trained to apply this scheme consistently, and inter-coder reliability is tested to ensure replicability. Finally, the data is analysed, and meaningful patterns, relationships, or trends are interpreted to answer the research question (McMillan 2000). These structured principles ensure that content analysis is systematic, reliable, and provides meaningful insights.

Results

The election campaign of the political party *Progresīvie* on *Instagram* commenced on 13 February 2024 with post: "🩶Your 9th list for the 8 June European elections – @Progresivie! Together with Elīna Pinto and Mārtiņš Staķis, we have prepared a powerful and energetic offer with something for everyone. 🩶 Take a look! www.progresivie.lv/ep (link in profile). #EuropeanElections #Elections #Elections2024 #Elections2024 #ElīnaPinto #Pinto #MārtiņšStaķis #Staķis" (@progresivie 2024a).

7 June is the last day of the general election campaign, as the period of silence enters. In this message, the party focuses on its two leading candidates. Although Elīna Pinto is number one on the party's electoral list, this message highlights both her and the former mayor of Riga, Mārtiņš Staķis, who is number two on the list.

Table 1. Number of *Instagram* posts

Instagram posts		
Focus on Elīna Pinto	Focus on Mārtiņš Staķis	Focus on both candidates
30	16	12

During the pre-election communication period from 13 February to 7 June, posts on the social media *Instagram* related to the main candidates of the party have been selected for analysis, 59 posts in total.

Analysis of Elina Pinto posts

The highest number of "likes" for MEP candidate Elina Pinto is 203. The post was made on 6 June 2024 and is an excerpt from a debate between the EP candidates, the leaders of the party lists. The topic of the post is women's reproductive rights, and in the excerpt, Elīna Pinto argues against limiting women's reproductive rights. It should be noted that other posts on women's reproductive rights have also received the highest number of likes from *Instagram* followers.

- "8 June is also about your right to decide about your body and your future, not to leave it in the hands of 'self-proclaimed experts', says @ElinaPinto, candidate for the European Parliament" (@progresivie 2024b). 151 "likes".
- "Women's freedom, health and rights in Europe should not be different depending on where you live! "Cultural differences" are no excuse for politicians to take away a woman's right to decide about her own body, not in 21st century Europe, not in @progressive Europe" (@progresivie 2024c). 146 "likes".

The statistically highest number of "likes" was achieved with the entry of 30 May in collaboration with @europgreens: "🚄 Rail Baltica is a future railway line that will connect the Baltic States to the European rail network. Starting in 2030, it will be possible to travel from Berlin to Tallin with night trains and high-speed trains. 💚 Our lead candidate @terry_reintke and @eliinapinto from our Latvian member party @progresivie visited the construction site of Riga Central Station, which will become a hub for all international connections.EU For a strong & connected Europe: #ChooseCourage on 6–9 June!" (@progresivie 2024d). This post has 580 "like" marks, but that is due to the partnership with The European Green Party[2].

The post with the lowest number of "likes" – 43, is the 14 May entry: " ☑ European Parliament candidate @EliinaPinto: With Europe's help we can

2 The European Green Party is a European political party that is also known as the European Greens. The party bring together national parties that share the same Green values, and who are active across the entire European continent – both within the European Union and beyond (https://europeangreens.eu/about/).

protect Latvia and accelerate much-needed change. Take a look at what we have to offer:👉 www.progresivie.lv/ep (link in profile) #Progressives #ElinaPinto #Pinto #BelongingToEurope #ProtectLatvia #EuropeanElections #Election2024 #Elections2024" (@progresivie 20224e).

Analysing the number of "likes", Elina Pinto's posts have received an average of 78.3 likes.

Topics of posts

Posts of Elīna Pinto's campaign cover a wide range of topics (Table 2).

The topics represented in *Instagram* posts are not explicitly coded as areas of "female expertise". With the exception of 3 posts that directly address women's rights issues, there is no focus on welfare, education, family and health, which are marked as traditional areas of competence of a female politician.

Rather, it is an attempt to move away from the traditional representation of femininity. In the political party's *Progresīvie Instagram* account, Elina Pinto is not portrayed as a mother or a wife, private life scenes do not constitute part of the pre-election communication. The candidate is portrayed as a professional with no explicit gender coding. Two posts in particular highlight the candidate's activities, which are traditionally associated with masculine competences. These are the posts of 23 May (@progresivie 2024f) and 3 June (@progresivie 2024g). Both are small videos showing Elīna Pinto working for the Engure Volunteer Fire Brigade. The two recordings highlight the qualities of leadership and courage traditionally associated with a male leader.

Table 2. Topics of posts by Elīna Pinto during election campaign

Topics	
Meetings with voters	6
Nature protection/renewable energy	4
Poverty reduction/social security	2
Agriculture/environmentally friendly agriculture	3
Health	1
Animal protection	1
Women's rights/reproductive rights	3
International security/international cooperation/challenges	4
Call to vote	3
Labour law	1
Stories about yourself	2

Analysis of Mārtiņš Staķis posts

It should be noted that, although Mārtiņš Staķis is featured much less frequently on the party's *Instagram* account, the posts dedicated to him have gathered a significantly higher number of "likes". The post "Why every Latvian patriot should participate in the European Parliament elections" (@progresivie 2024h) has received the highest number of "likes" – 919. This post has been published both on the *Instagram* account of *Progresīvie* and on the private account of Mārtiņš Staķis. In the post, he calls on people to vote and specifically targets the pro-Russian forces in Latvian politics.

The post with the lowest number of "likes" – 30, is the one from 11 March: "🌍 Clean air, 💶 lower bills and 💪 independence are what we get when we finally get off the fossil fuel needle. @MartinsStakis is ready to go to Brussels to attract investment for a cleaner and more profitable future for Latvia! Vote for this or one of seven other initiatives and choose your politicians' first acts. Your opinion is our work!🗳 balso.progresivie.lv (link in profile) 🤔 What does this initiative mean in practice? It REQUESTS politicians to set up a European Union fund that will also finance renewable energy projects in Latvia. #Latvia #Election2024 #Election2024 #Election #Europe #Election #MārtiņšStaķis #Staķis #EuropeanParliament #Brussels #renewableenergy #environment #nature" (@progresivie 2024i)

Analysing the number of "like" marks received, it can be concluded that on average Mārtiņš Staķis's posts have received 179.7 "likes". This is significantly more than the number of "likes" for Elina Pinto's entries.

Topics of Mārtiņš Staķis' posts

Posts of Mārtiņš Staķis campaign cover a less extensive range of topics compared to the range of topics communicated by Elīna Pinto (see Table 3).

Table 3. Topics of posts by Mārtiņš Staķis during election campaign

Topics	
Nature protection/renewable energy	1
Poverty reduction/social security	2
Initiatives to improve Riga's urban environment	1
Cooperation with the European Green Party	3
Call to vote	3
Defence/ security of Latvia and Europe/threat of pro-Kremlin forces	6

Mārtiņš Staķis's recordings cover a narrower range of topics, and it should be stressed that the number of posts is also smaller compared to Elina Pinto. Most of Mārtiņš Staķis's topics are European security, Europe's ability to defend itself and the threat of pro-Kremlin forces in Europe – the properly masculine themes.

Analysis of candidates' joint posts

The number of posts where both candidates are together is the lowest of all pre-election posts. However, these posts also received more "likes" than Elina Pinto's individual posts. The average number of "likes" for both candidates' posts is 147.3. The post with the most "likes", 375, is the video made on 19 April "Elina and Martins with Elevator Pitch for Europe #What'sHappeninginBrussels" (@progresivie 2024j). In the post both MEP candidates try to explain in a short and relaxed way the role of the EP as a European policy maker. Ironically, the post with the lowest number of "likes" – 43, is also about the importance of the EP and calls for face-to-face meetings with MEP candidates. This is the entry of 20 March: "We invite everyone interested, and in particular the residents of Valmiera, to a discussion on "What is the point of the European Parliament?" – During the conversation we will discuss various issues, giving the audience the opportunity to raise an important idea that should definitely be implemented at European level. EU💬 The conversation will be attended by our EP candidates Elīna Pinto and Mārtiņš Staķis, Alta Elizabete Kraukle and Madara Senkāne (Valmiera Youth Council), Maija Dukure (Valmiera Pensioners' Association "V.P. Mežābele" and others. 23 March, 14.30📍 Concert Hall "Valmiera", Leona Paegles iela 10, Valmiera 🔗 If you are coming, please note the link in the profile description!" (@progresivie 2024k). The opportunity to meet the candidates in person did not attract much interest.

The scope of both candidates' contributions is rather narrow, more promoting the agenda of political party *Progresīvie* as such and explaining the functioning and importance of the EP. The range of topics offered does not highlight either candidate, as it does not focus on any particular set of topics that would highlight the specific competences of a candidate.

Table 3. Range of topics covered in posts

Topics	
Invitation to a meeting with parliamentary candidates	1
Explaining the work and role of the European Parliament	3
Participation in public events	1
Cooperation with the European Green Party	1
Offer of party *Progresīvie* to voters/call to vote	5
Defence/security of Latvia and Europe/threat of pro-Kremlin forces	1

An analysis of the two candidates' joint posts shows that both candidates are presented as partners and equal politicians. The communication does not emphasise gender stereotypes, nor do both candidates focus on gender-specific themes. The communication could be described as gender-neutral. However, the equal communication between the two candidates does not highlight Elina Pinto as the leader of the list.

Conclusions

The party's pre-election communication on *Instagram* can be seen as highlighting Elīna Pinto as the number one on the list. At the same time, the results of the content analysis show that the number of posts dedicated to Mārtiņš Staķis and both candidates is almost equal to Elīna Pinto's – 30 versus 28.Therefore, it cannot be clearly stated that the communication was 100% pro-Elīna Pinto. Content analysis also indicates that the posts dedicated to Elina Pinto receive on average far fewer "likes" than the posts dedicated to Mārtiņš Staķis and both candidates – 78.3 versus 179.7 and 147.3. Of course, it should be taken into account that Elīna Pinto was a newcomer to the Latvian political scene and much less known compared to Mārtiņš Staķis, who had been the Mayor of Riga, the capital of Latvia, from 2020 to 2023. Elīna Pinto became better known to the Latvian public in the summer of 2023, when the party *Progresīvie* nominated Elīna Pinto, the head of the association "esiLV", for the post of President of Latvia (Līcīte 2023). In view of this, the pre-election communication highlighting Elīna Pinto should have been more aggressive. However, at least on *Instagram*, this approach cannot be observed.

As mentioned above, the party *Progresīvie* supports gender equality and has included gender equality principles in its statutes. The analysis confirmed that no gender stereotypes were used in the campaign communication on *Instagram*. Elīna Pinto advocated for women's rights, but did not focus her communication and her expertise as a politician on areas traditionally reserved for women: education, welfare, health and family. Rather, Elīna Pinto was positioned as a knowledgeable leader who spoke about agriculture, energy policy and security.

A different approach can be observed in the communication of the number two on the party list, Mārtiņš Staķis. Staķis is a well-known politician, so the number of posts dedicated to him on the party's *Instagram* account is smaller. An analysis of the topics of posts shows that Mārtiņš Staķis communicates with voters on typically masculine topics, with the greatest emphasis on security and defence. This communication reaffirms Staķis as a leader, layering on top of voters' previous experiences of Staķis as the Mayor of Riga.

The gender balance of Latvia's elected MEPs has not been equal over time, with Latvian voters preferring male candidates. The experience of the political party *Progresīvie* in the 2024 EP elections shows that it is difficult for a female politician to win the support of voters, even if she is nominated as the leader of the party's list. Avoiding traditional stereotypes of femininity and emphasising leadership as a pre-election communication strategy did not bring the desired result.

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