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# Journalistic Independence: How social media are reshaping power structures in news broadcasting

Fritz Kohle, PhD (Cand.), University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Dr. Sony Jalarajan Raj, MacEwan University, Edmonton, Canada
Lucille Mazo, PhD (Cand.), MacEwan University, Edmonton, Canada

## Abstract

Content provided via social media from various conflict hotspots raises the question as to how social media are changing news broadcasting. Social media are and still continue playing a major role in the on-going Arab Spring, Occupy, and Wall Street movements. [i] Developments such as this highlight the important role of social media regarding the opinion forming process in the public domain during times of war and social unrest.

The conflict in Ukraine serves as an example: news broadcasters have been reproached of one sided reporting, i.e. the role of neo-fascists in the new Ukrainian government has been understated and Russia stands accused to have sent troops into Ukraine. Social media are increasingly used by news organisations and citizens alike to report from the frontlines. Can social media deliver on its promises of more democracy and transparency in news broadcasting?

At the same time it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between real user-generated content and content provided by questionable sources delivering social media propaganda. An example is the portrayal of Arseni Jakzenjuk, former and unelected president of Ukraine: manipulated pictures of him have been circulating online creating the impression that he was greeting visitors to a rally with a Nazi salute[ii].

The civil conflict in Ukraine demonstrates how social media challenge the domination of traditional mass broadcast media. User generated content and the unique characteristics of social media are challenging the traditional relations between media and political authorities. Responding to these new developments, political authorities are changing their audience outreach strategies.

This paper examines how users are reading mainstream news and are participating in the production of information on social media. Are social media providing a real alternative to mainstream news? Can citizens make better choices based on social media information? How much misinformation is saturating social media to confuse the public domain?

**Keywords**: social media, power structures, conflict, Turkey, Crimea, Ukraine, Russia

## Introduction

This paper examines how social media influence power structures in news broadcasting by reviewing relevant literature[iii] and by conducting two case studies. Social media are influencing an increasing number of industries. Therefore, it is important to assess and comprehend how social media are particularly strong factors that are inducing changes in news broadcasting and journalism.

## Research Methods

The main case study focuses on the social unrest in Ukraine as it was reported on by various Western and Eastern broadcasters who are located outside of Ukraine. Another case study focuses on two news and social media sites that are situated within Ukraine. These two selected case studies present information and insights into how news and social media sites affect the power structures involved in conflict and social disruption within a country. The news item chosen as the first case study shows how key events during the

Ukrainian crisis were reported by various mainstream broadcasters such as CNN, the BBC, Reuters, the German broadcaster Tagesschau, as well as Russia Today (RT), providing insights into cultural Western and Eastern perspectives in news broadcasting as well as the political agenda that drives them. Reuters is included because of its relevance as a news agency with an increasing presence in the public domain; it is a news provider which is not a traditional news broadcaster.

Representation of Ukraine on social media that are located outside of Ukraine is examined by focusing on major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Reporting via traditional news is then compared with social media sources to determine differences and to understand the relationships between news formation, political authorities, and mass media networks.

In addition, data from two Ukrainian news and social media sites—Kyiv Post and 2000.ua—are used as a case study to further demonstrate how social media (Twitter) on these news sites reveal differences in reporting on similar news events during the Ukraine social unrest. Direct examination of these news sites and their social media activities provide insights into how word selection and frequency can affect the perception of audiences visiting both mainstream and social media sites.

A discussion on how social media influence traditional broadcasting and power structures follows.

### Limitation of the Case Studies

The first case study provides conclusions based on available literature and the Ukrainian case study that includes news broadcasters located outside of Ukraine. Due to the fast moving nature of social media, it is challenging to remain up to date with developments. How users experience social media is indicative of using the above methods and this in itself may be a research topic worthy of further investigation. Verification of sources is challenging via social media and the boundaries between real and fake social media content is difficult to establish. The authors of this paper have used their best judgement to draw conclusions based on the evidence available, especially when sources are difficult to verify.

Data from the second case study provides conclusions based on content captured from two news and social media sites located within Ukraine which were captured and analyzed using a content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2004). A data mining text

analysis software that identified content themes located within the news stories and social media was applied to the text.

In both case studies, a limitation of time and event was imposed on by the authors due to the volume of content available to work within. For example, the first case study limited its focus on one main event, which was the Maidan Sniper shooting that occurred on one day. Whereas, the second case study captured over 30,000 words of text within the first ten days of data collection in March 2014, which was during the conflict of Crimea being occupied by Russia.

## Literature

### Background

During the Arab Spring, social media became essential sources for news broadcasters. The killing of Muammar Kaddafi was user generated content which not only pervaded social media networks but was also discussed at length by experts in the news room. Social media played a major role in disseminating information during the 15M demonstrations in Madrid and Occupy movements across the globe. Manuel Castel (2012)[iv] provides some insight into the origins, structure and influence of social networks in a global society but little has been published on changing power structures in news broadcasting. Aleks Krotoski (2010) examines how the Internet is forging a new brand of politics (2010)[v], but the influence of social media on news broadcasting is not discussed in detail. Harb (2011)[vi] discusses the potential of social media during the Arab Spring; however, how power structures are influenced in news broadcasting is not the goal of his study. Social media's ubiquitous presence in an increasing number of industries shows the need to further explore their influence in news broadcasting. The public is exposed to traditional and social media news sources daily and viewing habits among digital users are changing: news is consumed via mainstream broadcasters and internet sources on almost equal terms[vii]. Journalists and broadcasters alike are overwhelmed with the challenges social media present and reluctantly news broadcasters are responding to this change.

### Social Media and PSB's

Van Dijck and Poell[viii] (2014) have explored how public service broadcasters (PSB) have been reacting to the challenges of social media. They provide insight into how social media in public broadcasting developed: for example, Europe developed a license system for their TV broadcast corporations unlike the U.S., where commerce was driving the

development of TV. Most European states considered Television too important to be left to commerce alone. The BBC or German broadcaster ARD and the way both are funded by the public via a TV license serves as an example.

Social media in the public space were not considered important enough to be funded in this way and growth generated was driven purely via commerce on a global scale. As a response and especially in news, broadcasters have begun to not only use social media platforms themselves to disseminate and obtain news. They have also begun to set up their own social media platforms within their mission statement as a publicly funded broadcaster. For example, ARD's Tagesschau features a video archive and blog. Content can be reposted and made available via other social media networks such as Facebook, returning some control of content posted to ARD. The BBC developed its own version of a media playback tool—the iPlayer, which proved highly successful, in addition to its own video archive. PSBs have realised that they can use their old traditional broadcast formats to invade and reclaim some of the public space previously occupied by commercial social media platforms. They have also realised that maintaining social media is not only a two-way process but increasingly labour intensive: ignoring or not responding to user comments can have significant and dire consequences. German broadcaster ARD was forced to apologise for the way it reported in the Tagesschau about the Ukraine conflict[ix]. Social media have become an integral part of a new business model in news broadcasting as CNN's iReport[x] shows.

**The Promise of Social Media and the Role of the Journalist**

Social media continue to promise more democracy in news, more user generated content and less censorship and propaganda. Evaluating sources and their validity is very difficult via social media. The speed with which audiences expect to have news delivered to them threatens established journalistic ethical principles[xi]: For example, journalistic objectivity requires confirmation of news from more than one source before a news item should be published.

News are published with principles compromised in order to serve news as quickly as possible, or worse, news items are copied by a journalist from another news broadcaster or agency with little to no fact checking taking place. The Ying Chan of the Global Investigative Network states while "digitisation facilitates news gathering and dissemination, it does not necessarily foster better journalism. Plagiarism, lack of verification, and other unethical practices have increased alarmingly".[xii] Social media metrics, which is an unreliable science, are used to determine the success of a broadcaster's

social media strategy. As was the case with the ratings system in traditional news broadcasting, social media metrics are applied to justify the kind of news that should be published on social media networks. This places journalists into a difficult ethical situation when investigating news which may not generate the social media metrics results desired. As a consequence, van Dijk and Poell[xiii] (2014) conclude that journalists not only need "independence from commercial and political sources, but also from social platforms and their users."

In her article 'News Now"[xiv], Mimi Sheller (2015) provides evidence on how news, when combined with mobile platforms, have developed a "continuous real-time flow." Mobile devices and the digitisation of media combined with social networking have changed the way news are produced. The traditional way of investigating news is no longer able to cope with this new audience expectation. As a consequence, the business model is changing—and so are the fundamental rules of journalism. News are no longer presented one-way, and users have the ability to filter and control the kind of news they want to consume. Social media metrics, such as Twitter trends, are used to determine what is newsworthy, i.e. events unfolding in the Arab Spring. Mimi Sheller provides interesting insight into how news have become immediate and participatory because of mobile devices and social media networks, but she does not argue strongly to strengthen journalistic independence.

**Two Case Studies: News reporting on social conflict events in Ukraine**

To investigate how news events are being reported in Ukraine, we will discuss two key news events: the Maidan sniper shooting and the Crimea Referendum. We examine the first event from the perspective of the BBC, CNN, Russia Today, and Reuters, which are news sites situated outside of Ukraine. The second event is examined through the perspective of two news sites located within Ukraine, Kyiv Post and 2000.ua.net. We then compare how main stream news and social media sites report on these events. Two case studies are explained and described below.

**Case Study One: The Maidan Snipers; and Crimea Referendum—news sites external to Ukraine**

The victims of the Maidan demonstration were shot by snipers who to date remain unidentified[xv]. Images and videos of those snipers were uploaded by means of social media. On February 20, 2014, the BBC's Duncan Crawford reports that 'At least 21 protesters have been killed by security forces in Kiev'.[xvi] The report claims that video

footage showed snipers firing on demonstrators. Witnesses reported live rounds, petrol bombs and water cannons being employed at Independence Square in Kyiv. EU foreign ministers began to discuss possible sanctions against Ukraine and photos on the BBC website show Polish EU foreign minister Radek Sikorski meet with opposition leader Vitaly Klitschko, Oleh Tyahnybok and Arseniy Yatsenyuk on the same day. The BBC further reported that protests erupted in November 2013 when President Yanukovych rejected a landmark association and trade deal with the EU in favour of closer ties with Russia. Video footage on the site shows protesters being shot by unidentified snipers.

CNN reported on the same day that 'Diplomatic talks in Ukraine last until dawn, a day after 100 may have died'.[xvii] Casualties reported by CNN are higher, Radek Sikorski tweeted that talks with the government had ended at 7:20 a.m. Security forces were reported to fight protesters with automatic rifles and one sniper rifle. The report quotes a witness, Olga Bogomolets, who accused government forces of shooting 13 people. According to CNN the situation was complicated, protesters had taken hostages, the government reserved the right to use force; though later all hostages were released.

According to CNN the cause of the riots was President Yanukovych's decision to not sign a trade deal with the EU. CNN stated that Russia's position was that protesters are using the chaos in Ukraine to 'execute a violent coup'. The CNN article includes a link to an 'Explainer'[xviii], providing more background on the Ukrainian crisis. The explainer outlines how protests sparked off because of President Yanukovych's decision to side with Russia instead of the EU. He also faced massive criticism from the EU because of Yulia Tymoshenko's conviction based on the charge that she abused her political office when agreeing to a Russian gas deal. CNN reporter Phil Black reports hearing gun fire and numerous protesters falling in the streets after the hard core elements of the protesters began to attack police. When police retreated, the Maidan protesters were met with gun fire.

Russia Today (RT) reports on the same event as follows: 'Ukraine bloodshed: Kiev death toll jumps to 77'.[xix] Casualties are in the hundreds, RT reports that protesters and police officers were among the dead and injured and that the police have been authorised to use fire arms. According to RT, masked rioters fired rifles and pistols at the police, more dead protesters with gunshot wounds were reported. The US, EU, and NATO are quoted threatening sanctions; foreign minister Sergey Lavrov states that the actions of the Western states 'resemble blackmail' and urges condemnation of actions taken by radicals and extremists. The RT crew reports narrowly avoiding being shot by sniper fire, reporter

Aleksey Yaroshevsky and Egor Piskonuv claimed that unidentified snipers were firing from buildings all around Independence Square. Video footage shows reporter Egor Piskonuv near a window where he was almost shot, casualties are brought into the hotel he reports from, reporter Aleksey Yaroshevsky tells us that the police has pushed back and right wing protesters who allegedly refuse to adhere to the agreed truce gained ground. Video footage shows police being attacked with grenades.

The German Broadcaster Die Tagesschau reports on 22/2/2014[xx] of five casualties and some three hundred wounded protesters. Reporter Udo Lielischkies states that the Maidan square was about to be 'stormed', the chair of the society of gun owners called on all of its members to bring their guns to the demonstration; some 400,000 guns are registered in Kyiv alone.

President Yanukovych met with the opposition, Klitschko, Jazenjuk and Tyahnybok. The EU threatens Kyiv with sanctions and EU-President Barroso expresses his concern. Video reports on the site show protesters fighting with the police, there are wounded on both sides. A young man is shown to have succumbed to four bullet wounds. Commentary on the video quotes the government denying using guns and blaming the opposition instead, while we watch a police man fire his rifle. President Yanukovych is seen to meet with Klitschko, Jazenjuk and Tyahnybok.

**The Crimea Referendum**

The BBC reports on 16/3/2014 that 95.5% of the Crimean people voted in support of Crimea joining Russia.[xxi] The report mentions that Crimeans loyal to Kyiv boycotted the referendum, the vote itself is considered illegal by the EU and US. Pictures in the article show enthusiastic Crimeans celebrating the referendum, one picture portrays a chess playing Tatar who decided to boycott the vote. A phone call between President Obama and President Putin is said to have resulted in 'contrasting accounts' of the conversation with the Kremlin stating that both presidents sought to stabilise Ukraine, whereas President Obama claimed that the referendum was illegal. The EU is quoted in saying that the outcome of the vote will not be recognised. Refat Chubarov, leader of the Tatars' unofficial parliament claims that the referendum was illegal.

CNN reports on 16/3/2014 that preliminary results indicate 95% of voters are in support of joining Russia. The report also mentions the phone call of the two presidents, with Obama saying that the referendum was illegal and would not be recognised, emphasizing that Russia's actions were in violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. The White

House is quoted in saying that the vote took place 'under threats of violence and intimidation from a Russian military intervention'.

The article explains that the vote has put Russia and the US on a collision course not 'seen since the cold war'; the EU strongly condemns the vote. Russia responded by stating that the referendum conformed to international law. A link in the article provides leads to an explanation[xxii] but a clear explanation as to whether the vote is legal or not is not given. Instead, it rhetorically questions the legality of the referendum, depending on who you ask. Returning to the original article, we learn that CNN reports from a polling station, with voters expressing their strong support for Russia. Jazenjuk dismisses the referendum as illegitimate, while the Crimean Election Commission confirms that elections were not tampered with. This is confirmed by CNN analyst and Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner. Tatars are also mentioned as a group of Crimean residents who boycotted the vote. The article mentions pro-Russian propaganda in the run up of the referendum, portraying the Jazenjuk government as NAZI, which is why Russia insisted on its right to protect ethnic Russians in Ukraine. The Russian naval and military presence in the Black Sea and Crimea is discussed, and agreements between the Ukrainian and Russian government are reported which facilitate the delivery of food and basic supplies to Ukrainian forces stationed in Crimea. Chancellor Merkel is also mentioned; she critiques Russian activities and urges for members of the OSCE to monitor the situation in Ukraine.

Again, the Kremlin provides a constructive account of the phone call between Merkel and Putin. The Kremlin also expresses concerns about 'radical groups' in league with Kyiv, stirring up tensions. President Putin insisted that the referendum is legal.

The German Tagesschau reports on 16/3/2014 'Facts and Figures on the Crimea referendum'.[xxiii] The article explains that 60% of Crimeans are Russian, some 2 Million are Ukrainian and 12% are Tatars. By the time the Tagesschau article was published, the Crimea parliament had already agreed to join the Russian Federation with Russia 'welcoming the Crimea back home.' Russia justifies the referendum by calling on the right of self-determination of the Crimean population. Crimea was Russian until 1954. Additionally, the Kremlin claims strategic security interests in the region; for example, the 200 year old Russian naval base of the Russian Black Sea fleet. The EU and the US claim a Russian 'annexation' of Crimea, but at the same time exclude military action in addition to sanctions. The article continues to describe that 1200 polling stations were open from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. and that the Crimean government expected an 80% turnout for the referendum. Voters are given two options: they can agree for reunification with Russia or

they can agree to restore the constitution of 1992 with Crimea forming a part of Ukraine. The 1992 constitution would grant Crimea substantial autonomy as part of Ukraine. Tatars are also confirmed to boycott the vote. OSCE observers are not attending and Russia is going to pay for the costs of the referendum. OSCE president Didier Burkhalter is quoted in saying that the referendum is illegal, which is why OSCE observers did not attend the referendum despite a request by the Crimea and Russia.

Russia Today reports on 16/3/2014 that 95.7% of Crimeans voted to join Russia.[xxiv]

Preliminary results indicate an 81.3% turn out, 3.2% voted to stay within Ukraine as an Autonomous Republic, 1.1% of the votes were declared invalid. Russia Today claims that half of the Tatars living in the port city of Sevastopol took part in the referendum, with the majority voting in favour of joining Russia. News agency Itar-Tass is citing the representative of the Tatar community Lenur Usmanov: Forty percent (40%) of the Crimean Tatars voted in the referendum according to this report. Fifteen thousand (15,000) people are reported to have gathered in the central Lenin Square in Simferopol to celebrate the referendum, waiving Russian and Crimean flags. President Putin said that the citizens of the peninsula were able to freely express their will and exercise their right to self-determination. Referendum observer Polish MP Mateusz Piskorski confirmed that the voting was held in line with international norms and standards. The ruble will be introduced next to Crimea; integration with Russia is expected to last a year, though maintaining relations with Ukraine is important.

**Discussion**

The Maidan sniper incident serves as a critical example of how news are being reported via mainstream sources. Audience expectations from mainstream news broadcasters are accurate and balanced news reporting. In the below table, we examined the facts presented by various broadcasters regarding the Maidan sniper incident:

Table 1: Broadcasters and the Maidan Sniper Incident

| News reported | BBC | CNN | Tagesschau | RT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of dead** | 21 | 100 | 5 | 77 |
| Unidentified snipers shooting on demonstrators | Yes | No | No | Yes |

| News reported | BBC | CNN | Tagesschau | RT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of dead** | 21 | 100 | 5 | 77 |
| Protesters and police officers are among the dead and injured. Police have been authorised to use fire arms | No | No | No | Yes |
| Protesters falling after hard core elements began to attack police. When police retreated protesters were met with gun fire. | No | Yes | No | No |
| Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov states that actions of the Western states 'resemble blackmail'. Urges condemnation of actions taken by radicals and extremists. | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Security forces are reported to fight protesters with automatic rifles and sniper rifles | No | Yes | No | No |
| News reported | BBC | CNN | Tagesschau | RT |
| Hostages were taken and later released | No | Yes | No | No |
| EU discusses sanctions against Russia | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Polish EU foreign minister Radek Sikorski met with opposition leader Vitaly Klitschko, Oleh Tyahnybok and Arseniy Yatsenyuk | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Protests erupted because President Yanukovych rejected trade deal with the EU | Yes | Yes (in 'Explainer' Link) | No | No |
| Total Yes | 4 | 6 | 1 | 4 |
| Total No | 5 | 3 | 8 | 5 |
| Total | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |

We notice that all four broadcasters present a significantly different account of events. On the day itself the BBC, CNN, Tagesschau, and RT did not even report the same number of casualties. Here, reports range from 5 to 100 casualties. Only the BBC and RT reported that snipers were 'unidentified'. CNN reports that protesters were met with gun fire when chasing the police, implying that it was the police or someone associated with the police who opened fire on the protesters. No evidence is provided to back up the suggestion. Instead, the report claims that security forces are firing on protesters with rifles, further implying that the police are responsible for the sniper shooting. CNN continues to report on hostages being taken and released again later. RT on the other hand reports that protesters and police are among the casualties, suggesting that snipers are not associated with the police. RT and CNN also report on Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov strongly condemning the shooting. All broadcasters except CNN report sanctions being discussed by EU and US politicians. The BBC and CNN report on the Polish foreign minister meeting with Ukrainian politicians, including one of the founding members of the Ukrainian National Socialist Party, also known as Svoboda. Both broadcasters also report on the background of the unrest, Yanukovych's rejection of a trade deal with the EU.

Readers who follow more than one news broadcaster will no doubt notice the discrepancies and bias depending on which perspective is taken. Not only are news broadcasters implying facts without a shred of evidence, critical facts are often not included, either because reporters are unaware of them, or they chose to omit them. Viewers who would like to have more factual and less biased reporting did not have an option to investigate in more detail themselves.

Social media, however, offer the opportunity to provide an alternative platform. The below table provides some key examples. The table comprises the title of the clip, user name, content, user channel on YouTube, credibility, and views obtained. Credibility was assessed higher, if the channel featured its own content rather than content obtained elsewhere, the amount of activity on the home channel, obvious bias presented in the clip and home channel, and background information provided in the 'about' section of the channel.

Table 2. Social Media, and Reporting Examples

| Title | User | Content | User Channel | Credibility | Views |
|-------|------|---------|--------------|-------------|-------|
| Article I.        Ukraine sniper shooting protesters in Kyiv, 20.02.2014[xxv] | Darek Zalweski | Footage from 8th floor of Hotel Ukraine, showing protesters being shot | Kropkinamapie.pl | Channel features only 3 uploads in total. Credibility low. | 3203 |
| Colonel Asavelyuk, Who Shot People on Maidan, Appeared Near Hotel Dnipro[xxvi] | Ukraine Investigation | Footage taken at Hotel Dnipro of Colonel Asavelyuk | Ukraine Investigation | Channel features high number of uploads. Features right wing symbol as channel logo, content biased against Russia. Credibility low. | 175 |
| Frontline Video of Maidan Protesters Being Shot By Snipers In Kyiv Ukraine, Feb 20 2014[xxvii] | Channel | Footage taken at Maidan of Maidan victims | Channel | Numerous uploads, no recent activity. Credibility low. | 23 |

| Title | User | Content | User Channel | Credibility | Views |
|-------|------|---------|--------------|-------------|-------|
| Uncomfortable truth about Ukraine[xxviii] | Yurecc 177 | Collection of footage taken at Maidan square during shooting. Includes analysis of time line of events. | Yurecc 177 | Features high number of uploads, mainly military and biased content. Credibility low. | 1494 |
| Liveleak-Maidan Inconvenient truth – shooting in the back | Annynameat all | Link to liveleak website analyzing Maidan shooting | annynameatall | Features high no. of uploads and links to similar channels and sites. Credibility low. | 15,955 |
| 20.02.2014 Near Maidan shooting of fighters on an unarmed police. | Муромец | Collection of Maidan footage | Муромец | Three uploads only, no recent activity. | 11,936 9 |

The above examples are certainly not representative of user generated content on this topic, but indicative regarding the lack of credibility this type of content offers. Obtained views differ significantly and range from less than a few hundred to thousands of views. But mainstream news broadcasters, governments, and political organisations have also discovered social media as a platform as the following examples show:

Table 3. Mainstream News, Broadcasters, Governments, Political Organisations and Social Media

| Title | Broadcaster / Organisation | Content | Channel | Credibility | Views |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kyiv snipers hored by Maidan protest leaders, Estonian Foreign minister claims[xxix] | RT America | Report on leaked phone call of Estonian foreign minister | RT America | High but with Russian bias | 5874 |
| Medics treat Ukrainian gunshot victims[1] | CNN International | Fighting at Maidan | CNN America | High but with Western bias | 2133 |
| Kyiv demonstrators rally into the night as opposition leaders meet with the presidency[xxx] | Reuters | Footage of protestors holding out at Maidan square | Reuters | High but with Western bias | 896 |
| Under sniper fire in the Ukraine uprising – BBC News | BBC | Footage from the Maidan square | BBC | High but with Western bias | 108,421 |

RT, CNN, BBC, and Reuters have not only established a strong presence via social media, the BBC's report 'Under sniper fire in the Ukraine uprising' managed to obtain the most views. RT has managed to obtain more than 1 billion views on YouTube.[xxxi] Nevertheless, the enormous amount of user generated content by far outweighs content provided by mainstream broadcasters on social media and even though credibility is regarded low, viewer numbers can be high.

It is not yet clear how much misinformation is spread via social media, as well. This could be an interesting topic for another paper. One-sided reporting by mainstream broadcasters, inconsistent reporting of facts and figures and the lack of fact checking could be a strong factor driving audiences away from mainstream and towards social media news sources. Social media does not have the 'brand' reputation such as the BBC or CNN experience. But does that mean information available on social media is less accurate or factual, provided one knows how to investigate a topic? The case of citizen journalism is another salient topic for further investigation and research.

**Case Study Two: News Sites and Social Media Reporting on the Crimea Referendum—news sites internal to Ukraine**

While it is important to examine social media and news sites external to Ukraine such as the BBC, CNN, RT, and *Tagesschau* that reported on the Maidan conflict, it is also important to investigate how social media and news sites internal to Ukraine reported on other conflicts related to the Maidan. Subsequently, in 2014 information was gathered from two news media sites in Ukraine to determine how related Maidan events were reported on and to identify any similarities or dissimilarities in journalists' depiction of the conflicts.

For two weeks in March (Crimea Referendum) data were captured and recorded twice a day from the main articles and related tweets of two online news sites in Ukraine—Kyiv Post (in English) and 2000.ua (in Ukrainian). The study analyzed these two news sites and their tweets in order to understand how news reporting in two languages regarding the Crimea Referendum provided different perceptions about this conflict.

By examining the primary keywords, phrases, and frequency patterns in these two news sites and their tweets, insights and understandings about these perceptions were observed. How do the words used by journalists within the content of the news site stories and their accompanying social media (Twitter) postings shape how others viewed the power structures that shaped this conflict? In what ways did the language usage and

frequency on these news sites affect how Ukraine, Crimea, and Russia are being perceived? How does the role of news media as a social body affect the way we understand conflict and the role of power structures?

An example of how media and power structures shape an audience's perception and understanding can be seen in the news site article and twitter postings that were included on the Kyiv Post news site on March 14, 2014: "As Crimea referendum looms, many feel outcome a foregone conclusion" (March 14, 2014, 8:03 p.m. | Ukraine — by Oksana Grytsenko**).** The power structures of Crimea, Russia, and Ukraine are presented within the context of the upcoming Referendum. To demonstrate how words and their frequency can affect perceptions of power structures, this article included 334 primary keywords, with referendum mentioned 14 times, Crimea mentioned 8 times, Russia mentioned 4 times, and Ukraine mentioned twice. Given that the words 'referendum', 'Crimea', and 'Russia' dominate the main text of this article, we notice that they are directly connected to the power structure of Russia—while the power structure of Ukraine is minimally mentioned within the article. It can be observed that in the first three paragraphs of the article that the power structure of Ukraine is not even mentioned, even though the conflict is occurring in Ukraine and not in Russia. It can be noted that the focus of the article is generally on Russia and its influence on Crimea, which is a part of Ukraine.

### Kyiv Post (March 14, 2014) (News article excerpt)

**SIMFEROPOL, Crimea** -- Crimea is two days from the much anticipated referendum that will decide its future, but many believe the outcome to be a foregone conclusion.

Sergiy Aksyonov, the new Crimean Prime Minister who was elected weeks ago after armed men captured the autonomous republic's parliament, said during a news conference on March 14 that he had a strong feeling people will choose to join Russia come March 16, when the referendum will be held.

"On Monday we will meet you in new (independent state)," he told journalists, adding that about 80 percent of the peninsula's population is expected to participate in the vote.

The following table provides some statistics on word usage and frequency within news articles and Twitter sites when journalists reported on the Crimea Referendum social conflict. Content from news site articles and tweets in both Ukrainian and English languages was inserted into an online software program (TextFixer) to identify the

frequency of words used within each article. The results of this analysis identified various word selection trends regarding how news media and social media presented "Conflict" in relation to Ukraine and the Crimea Referendum.

Table 4. Ukraine News and Twitter Sites – Word usage comparison when reporting on the Crimea Referendum

| 2000.Net (Ukrainian language) | | | | Kyiv Post (English language) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| News Articles | | News Article Twitter Postings | | News Articles | | News Article Twitter Postings | |
| 10 most frequent primary keywords | Word frequency | 10 most frequent primary keywords | Word frequency | 10 most frequent primary keywords | Word frequency | 10 most frequent primary keywords | Word frequency |
| 1. Russia | 128 | 1. Russia | 4 | 1. Russia | 176 | 1. Ukraine | 15 |
| 2. Crimea | 104 | 2. Crimea | 4 | 2. Ukraine | 174 | 2. Russia | 10 |
| 3. Putin | 60 | 3. Ukraine | 3 | 3. Crimea | 104 | 3. Crimea | 9 |
| 4. Ukraine | 59 | 4. Black Sea | 1 | 4. March | 77 | 4. Lavrov | 5 |
| 5. Referendum | 37 | 5. Foreign Ministry | 1 | 5. Referendum | 38 | 5. Kerry | 4 |
| 6. Ego | 33 | 6. U.S. Missile | 1 | 6. Military | 35 | 6. U.S. | 4 |
| 7. People | 32 | 7. Destroyer | 1 | 7. Simferopol | 32 | 7. Yanukovich | 4 |
| 8. Krymskie/ Krym | 27 | 8. Defeat | 1 | 8. Aksynov | 24 | 8. Maidan | 3 |
| 9. Kyiv | 23 | weakness | 1 | 9. Vote | 23 | 9. Finance | 3 |
| 10.Sevastopol /votes | 22 | 9. Sevastopol | 1 | 10. Base | 20 | Ministry | |
| | | 10.Referendum | 1 | | | 10.military | 2 |

Based on the data collected from news articles and tweets between March 10-20, 2014 (30,000 words), over 7,000 more words in the Ukrainian language were used to report activities related to the Ukraine conflict that involved Russia entering Crimea. This indicated that approximately 40% more words were used to identify, describe, and explain these activities in the Ukrainian versus English language. The top four primary keywords identified as the most frequent words used within the Ukrainian language on the 2000.net news site were *Russian, Crimea, Putin,* and *Ukraine.* Other words that provided critical descriptions that influence perceptions were *Referendum, Ego, People, Krym, Sevastapol,* and *Votes.* There were approximately 40% fewer English words used to report activities concerning Ukraine and the Crimea Referendum in news articles and tweets. The number of tweets posted on the Kyiv Post news site were 18 times greater than those posted on the 2000.net news site (in Ukrainian). And, more than 50% of the tweets were posted by those who manage the Kyiv Post news site. This leads one to believe that the news site information may have been presented through a controlled filter. Perceptions of the event have the potential of being presented differently through this approach.

As such, the following are observations about news and social media's role in relation to the conflict of the Crimea Referendum:

- Due to the significant increase in the number of articles and the word count overall on the 2000.net news site that is in the Ukrainian language, the sheer volume of information is in itself perceived as presenting the image of greater interest about activities concerning the conflicts within Ukraine.

- In both Ukraine based news sites, 2000.net and Kyiv Post, the word "Russia" (as written in both Ukrainian and English languages) is the most frequently used word, overall. The perception that Russia is the most important player and stakeholder in the activities related to these conflicts suggests that Ukraine is presented as a secondary player. Given that Crimea is part of Ukraine, the word frequency, and word selection suggests differently. Who is the power structure in this event? Crimea, Russia, or Ukraine?

- News and social media affect our understanding of conflict. This institution within society is responsible for reporting truth about a conflict. These two news sites consistently reported Crimea and Russia as the most important "stakeholders" in the conflict. The affect is long lasting and indelible.

These case studies provided insights into the Maidan Sniper Incident as well as the Crimea Referendum in terms of reporting through news and social media sites. The power structures mentioned within these news reports and tweets reveal how accuracy of information, and selection and frequency of word usage can influence the perceptions of these structures—stories and tweets by professional journalists, as well as citizens affect and change the credibility and relevancy of the content. The following provides conclusions about these case studies in relation to media and power structures and journalism. .

## Conclusion

Traditional news broadcasting in Europe struggled during the 90-ties and early 2000s to adapt to the challenges provided by social media. User generated content at times was more actual and relevant to the audience compared to the well-polished appearance of a news anchor and his team. Events covered during the Arab Spring, Occupy-, 15M-movement and user generated content from Ukraine by citizens via their mobile phones, highlighted the need for broadcasters to change their approach. Many of them now have

a social media presence—some stronger than others. YouTube, Facebook—a team of professional bloggers is now active for many of the mainstream broadcasters operating in the public domain. Commercially driven broadcasters such as CNN followed that trend sooner than PSBs by developing for example iReport as a platform for users to contribute unique content. This does not mean that PBSs remained inactive. Though social media as such were not considered for public licensing, PSBs realized that they can reclaim their public space (Habermas, 2006) in social media: a presence on Facebook or YouTube alone will not achieve that goal. So, the BBC developed its highly successful iPlayer. Germany's ARD and ZDF developed their own social media blogs and news archive, providing a platform for users to express their views and more importantly enabling those broadcasters to collect data on their audience and community. The data collected in this way is an important milestone for PSBs to determine their future media strategy in addition to traditional metric systems, i.e. Nielsen[xxxii].

Additionally, it is evident that the Kyiv Post news site within Ukraine also adopted the approach of social media (Twitter) by creating an opportunity for the public to respond to their news site stories. The frequency of critical words used by the public and journalists in their tweets and retweets indicated how these postings are influenced by the content of the main stream news articles. In other words, there appears to be a direct relationship in word assimilation when a news story transitions from the main content to the shorter version of a 140 character limit within a tweet. The merging of tweets from journalists and the public suggests that some of the content in the postings is not necessarily supported by fact checking journalistic practices and therefore, may lack accuracy. This can affect an audience's understanding and perceptions of power structures within a crisis situation that involves serious issues between political powers and their worldviews, such as the Crimea Referendum. Influence of public knowledge and opinion is consistently confronted by these audiences—professionally trained journalists and citizen journalists. Therefore, where does the line of journalistic independence and integrity begin and end during conflict events?

Journalistic integrity requires independence from commerce and censorship. In the best of situations that is nearly impossible. In this paper we demonstrated that even for a single event during the Ukraine conflict, the Maidan shooting, all broadcasters examined differed significantly in their reporting of facts regarding the Maidan shooting. Some broadcasters were clearly biased and there is a rift between the Western and Eastern (CNN vs. RT for example) approach in news reporting. Audiences realize that events are often reported with bias and significant differences in perspective, often unsupported by facts

and unchecked according to ethical journalistic guidelines. Journalistic independence and integrity was also investigated with respect to news and social media sites within the country where the event occurred (Ukraine).

Social media promises audiences freedom from what they perceive to be biased and censored reporting. Yet social media sources are notoriously difficult to verify and it requires some investigative skills to determine whether or not a source has some credibility. Additionally, news agencies, broadcasters, governments, and spy agencies have also discovered social media as a platform for their activities. Some of their news items, reports and publications are easily recognized as a biased news programme or propaganda – others pretend to be user generated content in order to sway public opinion as intended.

Most users do not have the time or resources to investigate which social media source is reliable and an emotional appeal rather than actual facts can contribute to higher viewing numbers and hits when using social media. The most dangerous threat to journalism is social media content disguising itself as user generated when in fact it was produced by a corporation or government with the intent to shape rather than inform public opinion. It is nearly impossible to tell how much social media really is a form of propaganda compared to real user generated content. Users, unable to check on the trustworthiness of social media content and disillusioned by traditional media may simply disengage from the opinion forming process altogether.

Broadcasters are slowly reclaiming their public space in the social media domain and it may well be that users will begin to return to those sources as a more trusted and reliable news source compared to the promise social media cannot keep: user generated content cannot be verified in the majority of cases, propaganda is increasingly ubiquitous in the social media domain, especially when political or corporate interests are at stake. Only governments and corporations can afford to fund significant social media propaganda strategies.

The speed and immediacy with which audiences now expect to participate in a 'live-news-stream' also is a direct threat to journalistic principles regarding verification of facts and sources. This kind of pressure often results in untidy journalism or, journalists simply copying news items from other broadcasters and agencies without appropriate fact checking. Journalists who want to keep working in the business may not often have other choices due to competitive and financial pressures. This combined with the expectation that news is delivered nonstop online further adds pressure on journalistic integrity.

The above shows that it is dangerous to underestimate the audiences' capability to distinguish between bias mainstream news reporting as the example of the Tagesschau apology shows. To regain credibility with their audiences, journalists need to find a way to reestablish their independence from commerce and government in addition to user generated content. They need to convince audiences with the quality of their work and regain the trust of their audiences by accurately reporting facts, figures and by applying true journalistic principles, not only needed in traditional broadcasting, but especially when working with social media. This is strongly evident when the content of news stories is transitioned to social media sites where citizen journalism influences the accuracy of this content, and potentially compromises the truthfulness of an event that occurs during a crisis such as Arab Spring, Occupy, and the Maidan. The perceptions of these conflict events depend upon the accuracy of news and social media sites that are responsible for reporting facts to the public. Credibility of news sites is crucial to understanding the relationship between news and social media, journalistic practices, and power structures.

## Acknowledgement

**Fritz Kohle,** *PhD (cand.) studied at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design and as a postgraduate at the Northern Media School, Sheffield Hallam University. He currently studies for a PhD at the University of Edinburgh investigating the impact of social media on documentary production. In 2009, he obtained tenure at NHTV, University of Applied Sciences, Breda, Netherlands, as a senior lecturer teaching Film & TV production, while continuing his professional production practice. In collaboration with the Ludwigsburg Film Academy in Germany, he published the media handbook Medienmacher Heute. Kohle's projects include post-production management for Studio Babelsberg features in Berlin, such as Wim Wender's Soul of a Man, and Jackie Chan's 80 Days around the World. Kohle was Bigfoot Entertainment's Head of Post Production until 2007. In June 2007, he joined New York Universities Tisch School of the Arts as Assistant Director for the Production and Post-production Centre, significantly contributing to the establishment of the NYU Singapore Campus.*

**Dr. Sony Jalarajan Raj** *is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, MacEwan University, Canada. Dr. Raj is a professional journalist turned academic who has worked as reporter, special correspondent and producer in news media channels like BBC, NDTV, Doordarshan, AIR, and Asianet News. Dr Raj served as the Graduate Coordinator and Assistant Professor of Communication Arts at the Institute for Communication, Entertainment and Media at St. Thomas University Florida, USA. He was full time faculty member in Journalism, Mass Communication, and Media Studies at Monash University, Australia, Curtin University, Mahatma Gandhi University and University of Kerala. Dr. Raj was the recipient of Reuters Fellowship and is a Thomson Foundation (UK) Fellow in Television Studies with the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association Scholarship.*

**Lucille Mazo,** *PhD (cand.), is the Chair of the Department of Communication, MacEwan University, Canada. During her 23 years of teaching, she has received the MacEwan University Distinguished Teaching Award. She is completing her PhD in learning and communication styles as they relate to university professors. Other and ongoing research areas include communication and sustainability at international universities. She is the founder of Earth Common Journal, Department of Communication, MacEwan University, which is an international student managed, edited, and written research journal that focuses on three critical global concerns: sustainability, conservation, and climate change. Her research on online news sites as they reported on the Ukraine conflict in 2013/2014 from the context of Canadian and Ukrainian perspectives has enabled her to travel to Kyiv in 2015 and will be travelling there in 2016.*

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