PLATFORMIZATION AND CHANGING NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN LITHUANIA

MS Teams Workshop

December 16, 2021 at 11:00-13:00 hrs

CONCEPT NOTE

Economic outcomes of platforms are well recognized. Platforms propose a myriad of engaging forms of communication and direct 'assistances' for byers and sellers of content. Naturally, all these individual user interests' focussed technologies and infrastructures create flexible options for interaction and content production. As powerful machineries – data infrastructures and content technologies – geared to meet user-needs, platforms are acknowledged as 'service providers' no other contemporary institutions and industries are yet capable to compete with.

Indeed, platforms grow by acquiring users. Their digitally managed 'economic mindset' runs on user engagement and attention grabbing and data management strategies. However, as deeply individual preferencies focussed technologies, platforms may also act as triggers of stark political, economic and social transformations and even crises many contemporary societies are not yet adequatelly equipped to resolve.

Acceleration of populist and radicalist communication, dominance of strategically planned intensions to harm and manipulate citizens and destroy institutions are among only a few social calamities which accelerated just in a few recent years.

Furthermore, for all small nations with linguistically restricted communications arenas the dominance and arising power of global GAFAM players and their socio-transformative influences are highly provoking. Even more, the transformative effects are especially unfavourable in countries where economic fluctuations are frequent and professional uncertainty is especially high.

Governmental interventions via regulatory meassures, media literacy advancements promoting adequate skills and competencies for individuals and groups, and collaborative partnerships building with different stakeholders are proposed as examples of 'whole of society' approaches in tackling actual and potential effects of global platform influence.

The Workshop on **Platformization and Changing News Media Ecosystem in Lithuania** is designed to address some of the most deep-seated uncertainties listed above. It is planned as the final event of the graduate class 'Democracy and Media Policy in a Transforming Communications Ecosystem' taught by prof. Hannu Nieminen and prof. Auksė Balčytienė in the Master's Program Fufure Media and Journalism at Vytautas Magnus University.

Six thematic issues ranging from transformed media landcaspes and changes in media use, impacts on media business and journalism, and inquiries on regulatory concerns for platform governance will be presented by students and stakeholders from academic, media and telecommunications sectors. The workshop will conclude with some of the most pressing issues in each of the pre-selected analysis areas. Each of the area will also provide some insights as policy-making proposals.

QUESTIONS TO BE ADRESSED:

- What is the impact of global platforms on local/national media business solutions? How journalism and advertising practices are reconfigurred by digital platforms? How do digital platforms reconfigure media audiences?
- From your viewpoint, what are the most important challenges and opportunities that digital platforms bring to media and communications industry in a small news market?
- Which role(s) have policy makers to play in this context of platform governance?

PLATFORMIZATION AND CHANGING NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN LITHUANIA

WORKSHOP PLAN

11:00–11:05   Opening Remarks

**Prof. Auksė Balčytienė,
Prof. Hannu Nieminen.**

**11:05–11:25
Insights from research reports by students**

Effects of platformization on the Lithuanian media landscape
Liutaura Vaičiukinaitė, Laima Ladyšaitė, Grytė Žitkienė.

Legal perspective to media platformization
Andrea Capovin and Francesca Zito.

Platformization and journalism
Aistė Turčinavičiūtė and Justė Meištaitė.

**11:25–12:00
Experts' panel responses**

Dr. Anda Rožukalne,
Professor of Media Studies, Riga Stradinš University, Latvia.

Ms. Julija Kalpokienė,
Young Professional at Internet & Jurisdiction Policy Network (France), Practicing Lithuanian lawyer, Lecturer in law, PhD Candidate at Vytautas Magnus University Faculty of Law.

Mr. Stasys Drazdauskas,
Lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Vilnius University, Head of Technology, Media and Telecommunications team at Sorainen.

Mr. Jaunius Špakauskas,
Head of Corporate Communications at BITĖ Telecommunications.

12:00–12:05   Coffee break

12:05–12:25
Insights from research reports by students

Platformization and acceleration of dis/misinformation

Rimgailė Kasparaitė and Remigijus Tumosa.

Effects of platfomization on media use

Kristina Jarusevičiūtė, Laimonas Žvirblis, Ieva Rudokaitė.

Effects of platformization on media economics and changed business models

Gabrielė Palubeckytė and Villius Monkūnas.

12:25–13:00
Experts' panel responses

Ms. Ieva Ivanauskaitė,
Head of Business Development at Delfi.lt.

Dr. Andres Joesaar,
Professor of Media Economics at Tallinn University, Estonia.

Dr. Džina Donauskaitė,
Head of the Lithuanian Journalism Centre.

Dr. Deimantas Jastramskis,
Professor of Media Economics and Policy at Vilnius University.

13:00–13:05   Closing statements and observations

Prof. Auksė Balčytienė,
Prof. Hannu Nieminen.

PLATFORMIZATION AND CHANGING NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN LITHUANIA

ABSTRACTS

IMPACT OF PLATFORMIZATION ON A TRANSFORMING LITHUANIAN MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Liutaura Vaičiukinaitė, Laima Ladyšaitė, Grytė Žitkienė

This report aims at presenting insights about systemic transformations encountered in the Lithuanian media landscape in the past decade. As revealed, the 'speed' factor appears one of the defining notions of structural changes in media and communications. Speed is encountered as defining characteristic in all types of modern media people use on a daily basis to access, to share, and to self-express. The Internet and mobile technologies (smart phones, tablets) are the top popular means for such acts allowing people to communicate not only faster but also in a truly "movable" manner, and this is one of the reasons why conventional press (newspapers) is not that popular anymore. Another thing is the expenses, for example how much does it costs to release the newspaper or the journal and how much does it cost to share a post on Facebook or to post a picture on Instagram, or to write an article on some website, and just press the button "publish". Using mobile devices everything is faster and cheaper, that is why people are more into using the Internet and different apps for every situation in their lives – be it personal, professional, academic, or civic needs.

If we look at the tendencies it is obvious that the need for niche media to fulfill audience requirements is increasing. Speed in the commercial media segment is now a key-criterion. Personalization is also very important; marketers communicate with customers by personalizing offers, advertisements, products, packaging, and the need for the latter has now increased significantly due to the increased scale of e-commerce. With Covid-19, the use of the Internet, digital broadcasting (digital TV) and mobile devices skyrocketed. Everything is now possible on the Internet: people work, study, read, and pay their bills, etc. with apps, and everything they do is on the Internet, in their phones and laptops.

Recommendations: The move into virtuality also had a huge change on people's education and learning of digital skills and competences. For example, older people in Lithuania are learning how to use Facebook and other apps (we also see it in our families, like our grandparents or parents started using smart phones, smart watches, and computers). What is needed is a special program on media literacy to improve digital media use and media competencies, especially for seniors and other vulnerable groups, including national and social minorities. Further transformations in media environment in Lithuania may require new relevant niche media to emerge with topics and unique content, since there are plenty of subjects that are not presented to audiences. Within this action, questions linked with media financial support mechanisms and production diversity must be assessed

ABSTRACTS

PLATFORMIZATION AND PRIVACY IN A CHANGING REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Andrea Capovin and Francesca Zito
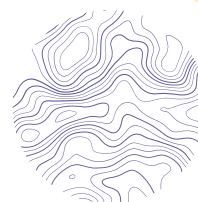
In today's world, the connection between the concept of platformization and its regulation becomes increasingly important. New doubts always arise in response to evolving technologies. In this paper, the main questions we are trying to answer are "Is the current regulatory framework of platformization adequate? and "Does it need to be transformed in the future?". The issues we are concerned about are also themes of discussion between different actors such as politicians, businesspeople and regulators. The aim of this paper is to analyze the current legal regulation regarding platforms at the European and Lithuanian level, especially what concerns one of its main issues: privacy.

During the process of preparation of our work, we discovered some possible solutions to those problems. Inevitably, an important element that is omnipresent in our research is "change". We found out that in the current years, due to the constant evolution of technologies, lots of concepts and notions are required to be adapted accordingly: the definition of privacy, the international regulation related to platformization in an attempt to keep up with those innovations, and the national regulation mutating alongside the international one to avoid administrative fines. In accordance with those findings, the law is always challenged by digital platforms and needs to make a good faith effort to enforce people's means to control how their data is used and who has access to it. Recent proposals for new EU regulations (Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act) are important steps, but as such not yet enough to fully answer to the challenges of the big digital platforms.

Recommendations: As a recommendation to European and Lithuanian legislators, it seems to be necessary to work proactively to build effective platform politics and regulations. In fact, the national regulators have limited autonomy to intervene in this field so the only solution is a direct and continuous collaboration with the international actors. This relationship is required and needed in order to protect states and their people against the immense strength of these "virtual gods": the platforms.

PLATFORMIZATION AND CHANGING NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN LITHUANIA

ABSTRACTS

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF PLATFORMIZATION ON LITHUANIAN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Aistė Turčinavičiūtė and Justė Meištaitė

This report highlights the fact that there is a negative correlation between the use of platforms by news media and public trust in news media: while the former is rising, the latter is falling. Then, the connection between the public trust and the quality of journalistic products is made. It is believed here that declining trust in news media is influenced by a declining quality of news content. The report focuses on professionalism as an indicator of high-quality journalism and highlights three aspects that constitute professional journalism: autonomy, professional values, and self-organization. Each of those arenas has been affected by platformization.

The interviews were conducted with journalists from various online media platforms, who agreed to reflect on the effects platformization has on the quality of news media, the state of professional journalism, and the changes in news making, distribution of news, and engagement. The interviews revealed that the growing use of platforms in news media highly affects the quality and the value of the produced content. Professional journalism is declining mainly due to two aspects: the financing model of news media outlets and the interests of the audience. The public popularity and interest in certain topics influence the journalists' focus and the themes of the articles they write. As the public wants to be entertained, news media focus on producing content of that effect. Consequently, the more popular or provocative the online post, the more engagement it gets, the more similar content is produced.

As the high-quality content is not as engaging, the journalists usually are not inclined to produce it. Although individual values of journalists, truth-seeking and objectivity, are present and closely related to professionalism, the editorial policy in a profit-oriented market prevails. In addition, the interviews revealed that one of the factors that limit the amount of high-quality content in news media is the size of news media companies, with most of them being very small and limited in their capabilities. It is currently impossible to make professional journalism a mass product.

Recommendations: We believe that one of the ways to encourage journalists to produce more "serious" and high-quality content is for the state to partially finance them. Consequently, those media platforms would not be as dependent on popularity and clicks as they are now. Then more researched articles could be written with a goal to educate the audience rather than shock them or feed them irrelevant but provocative

7

information. The more these media outlets are treated just as businesses, the less they actually care about the production value. To conclude, the issue of media diversity and pluralism appears among the top matters and concerns in public policies linked with digitalization and information accessibility, content production and quality assurance.

PLATFORMIZATION AND CHANGING NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN LITHUANIA

ABSTRACTS

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND PLATFORMIZATION EFFECTS ON MENTAL HEALTH OF LITHUANIAN STUDENTS

Kristina Jarusevičiūtė, Laimonas Žvirblis, Ieva Rudokaitė
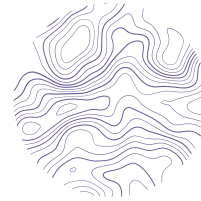
With the continuous growth of the phenomenon of platformization, social media effects on an individual's mental state are becoming a cause of concern. Extensive usage of social media platforms tends to increase rates of depression as well as loneliness, anxiety, and isolation. In some cases, these outcomes can even lead to suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts. The aim of this report is to figure out what aspects of platformization cause the increase in mental health issues for students in Lithuania who are most prone to be addicted to social media.

The research object was a survey that contained 12 questions regarding social media and its interrelation with mental health for Lithuanian students. The survey covered questions about social media usage habits, including the usage frequency as well as platforms that are most commonly opened. Regarding social media effects on mental state, different situations were presented to gain insights about the feelings that occur during them. On top of that, some survey questions were statements that Lithuanian students were supposed to either agree or disagree with. Such queries helped determine what are the most common views and approaches to stereotypes of social media and the mental state of an individual.

The theoretical overview consisted of exploring the phenomenon of platformization and its definition. Different illnesses or issues related to mental instability of students that advance with the overuse of social media were also examined. The results demonstrated that excessive consuming of content on social media is already an issue to the mental well-being of Lithuanian students. The phenomenon of platformization is causing university students to feel insecure and anxious.

Recommendations: The findings show that it is important for other parties to join in and spread awareness about negative effects of platformization on the mental health of students. As an example, the Ministry of Culture of the Lithuanian Republic could express their participation by further investigating social media habits of students. On top of that, a more in-depth interrelation between social media usage and mental illnesses in students could be examined to find out what are the most common psychological issues. Publication of such reports could also increase news media interactions with mentioned topics. Having in mind that it is common for news companies to have social media accounts, the platforms could be used for spreading awareness.
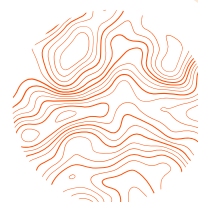
PLATFORMIZATION AND CHANGING NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN LITHUANIA

ABSTRACTS

DISINFORMATION AND PLATFORMIZATION

Rimgailė Kasparaitė and Remigijus Tumosa

Lithuanian information threats' monitoring capacities are mostly focused on and directed to the East, especially towards Russia, and most recently to Belarus. The most common information threats include the deliberate goal of undermining the public trust of the government, healthcare system, education, or science, also disinformation is used for the erosion of faith in democratic institutions. These information disorders are only partly monitored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), mostly by the Ministry of National Defense (KAM) – Strategic Communication and Public Relations Department, and as well by the State Security Department. Certain initiatives are taken by independent analytical centres such as DebunkEU.org or Civil Resilience Initiative (CRI). However, tools that are used for tackling information disorders in the case of platformisation are quite limited and fragmented. On the account of the aforementioned reasons and since media monitoring in Lithuania is relatively dispersed, the report aims to answer two critical questions: how disinformation related to COVID-19 is tackled among different governmental and non-governmental organizations in Lithuania? And if Lithuania lacks systematic approach, what could be possibly done to strengthen Lithuania's information disorders' monitoring and response strategies?

The final report concludes that 1) there is only limited information for the public on what particular departments (such as Ministry of National Defense or Ministry of Foreign Affairs) work and centres on, only mere guidelines and mission statements; 2) the latest technologies are not used to their full capacities, especially when it comes to monitoring social media platforms and fact-checking; 3) the resources gathered by individual institutions are not thoroughly analyzed by independent analysts or researchers who could perform the function of observing the regularities of disinformation and modeling efficient and quick response strategies. Finally, 4) there is only limited inclusion of the Lithuanian society regarding information monitoring and response processes.

Recommendations: There is a need for a systematic approach towards tackling disinformation which could be generated by the responsible ministries and departments, civil society organizations, NGO's, media, and academics. Supporting and investing into the latest technological solutions such as AI, that could detect disinformation cases. Moreover, supporting and assisting independent fact-checkers.

Increasing people's knowledge and assisting them in critiquing sources is one of the most effective approaches to combat deception. A working committee should be formed to establish a policy for media and information awareness education for people of all ages.

ABSTRACTS

CROWDFUNDED MEDIA: EFFECTS OF PLATFORMIZATION ON MEDIA ECONOMICS AND CHANGED BUSINESS MODELS

Gabrielė Palubeckytė and Villius Monkūnas
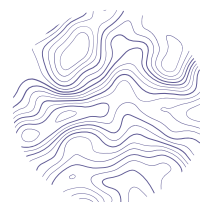
This report specifically looks at the crowdfunded journalism and its advancement since 2015. The crowdfunded journalism, though not massive, has already advanced to become an identifiable player in the Lithuanian media scene next to conventional media channels. While most of the data for crowdfunded journalism is easily accessible, gathering information about mass media, was more complicated: there was a lack of sources for the most recent statistics and detailed information, as well as archives that are available for regular visitors.

The main result of this analysis is that crowdfunded journalism is getting more popular since it seeks to advance topics that the public has deeper interest. Still, with crowdfunded journalism there is a greater chance of falsified or misleading information to reach and impact audience.

Recommendations: For crowdfunded journalism to become a stronger economic actor, suggestion is to increase media awareness (media literacy and media competencies) and to target the right audience – socially responsible, educated readers – in order to receive more funding to public affair topics. Also, misleading information should be quickly suspended, so it would not generate funding from the public audience. Other than that, there is a growing need to address the effects of the all-encompassing development of ICTs on the public's resilience to disinformation. A more inclusive media literacy policy addressing the needs of different groups of society (women, people with disabilities, children and adolescents, elders, minority groups, etc.) is in demand to combat disinformation and misinformation campaigns, but also to promote democratic and civic values, which are at stake in the times of pandemic.