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Self-Government Activity On Social Media As An Information Source To Cover Local Issues: Slovak And Ukrainian Journalists' Views

ABSTRACT

For the media, local self-government organizations are an important source of information when the public needs to know about local matters. In turn, for local self-governments, the media is one of the most useful means of communicating with residents. Citizens' understanding and awareness of local self-government and local issues are particularly important within decentralization resulting in the enhancement of local authorities' capacity. Under these conditions, local self-governments are becoming key communicators within their communities and are significant sources of information for local news reporting. It is evident that governments should use all available modern communication tools, including social media. The data from surveyed journalists from two countries – the Slovak Republic, where decentralization processes have already taken place, and Ukraine, which is still developing them – proves that local governments' social presence serves as an information source to cover local issues. The survey findings show that journalists integrate local governments' social media sourcing into their professional practices. Using local self-governments' sites on social media as journalistic sources provides journalists with important opportunities for extending their agenda, informing and updating people, and reflecting life at the local level.

KEY WORDS

Social media sourcing. Social media. Media. Local news. Government communication. Slovakia. Ukraine.

1. Introduction

Today, growing social demand for openness, transparency, and accountability of governance, on the one hand, and the development of information and communication technologies and increasing the accessibility and popularity of the Internet, on the other, strengthen the importance of online government communication. Within this framework, in the context of democratic development, modern governments apply different digital communication tools.

There is a consensus among social scientists that the Slovak Republic has made significant efforts to increase public access to government information as a result of reforms.[1] Decentralization, particularly the introduction of local (territorial) self-government, was considered an essential political and administrative task. Today, Slovakia has the most decentralized system in Central Europe.[2] This has enhanced the role of self-governments in both decision-making about important public affairs and acting as a platform for grassroots democracy and dialogue between citizens and the authorities. Ukraine is also currently undergoing decentralization reforms, which aims to give the real power to local self-governments, transfer powers and resources as near as possible to people and build capable communities at the local level. Such reform is considered a guarantee of the Ukraine's survival in the current situation.[3]

In the context of strengthening local self-government organizations by decentralization, they are becoming leading communicators in their environment and thus a significant source of local news reportage. In this regard, an important modern tool in government communication is social media, the popularity of which is rapidly growing. New digital media may help to raise the participation rates in different „*forms of direct democracy which tend to be quite low, particularly in the former Eastern bloc countries.*"[4] For communities, local self-government use of these platforms is a great example of adopting online communication to increase openness, transparency, and accountability. Their potential to extend self-government services, solicit new ideas, improve decision-making and problem-solving with the ability to update and share information, opinions, and thoughts offers substantial benefits and opportunities to governments, media, and people.[5,6,7]

Consequently, social media are weighty channels for local self-government organizations to inform, explain their policy, provide clarification on important issues, and therefore serve as a source for journalistic work. Despite the fact that modern technologies give journalists the opportunity to extend their agenda, for the audiences „*it is crucial to be informed about the closest environment.*"[8] Citizens expect that the content of newspapers, online media, radio, and TV will be local to some extent as such news is part of people's lives. Otherwise, the delocalized character of the media, in general, and local media, in particular, „*is likely to have an adverse effect on the democratic and political empowerment of local communities*"[9] and development of grassroots democracy.

[1] NEMEC, J.: Public Administration Reforms in Slovakia: Limited Outcomes (Why?). In *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 2018, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 121.

[2] KLIMOVSKÝ, D.: Slovakia as Decentralization Champion: Reality or Myth? In *Regions*, 2015, Vol. 2, No. 298, p. 14.

[3] KOLIUSHKO, I.: *Fear of Losing Power and Fear of Taking It.* [online]. [2020-11-20]. Available at: <https://zbruc.eu/node/32313>.

[4] VRABEC, N., ADÁMKOVÁ, P.: New Media and Their Potential in the Context of Development of Key Competences. In *SGEM 2014 International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on Social Sciences and Arts.* Albena : STEF92 Technology Ltd., 2014, p. 558.

[5] BERTOT, J. C., JAEGER, P. T., HANSEN, D.: The Impact of Polices on Government Social Media Usage: Issues, Challenges, and Recommendations. In *Government Information Quarterly*, 2012, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 30.

[6] HARMATIY, O. V.: Social Networks in the System of Government Communications. In *Scientific Papers,* 2016, Vol. 1, No. 52, p. 242.

[7] SHARIF, M. H., TROSHANI, I., DAVIDSON, R.: Determinants of Social Media Impact in Local Government. In *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing,* 2016, Vol. 28, No. 3, p. 82.

[8] STEBLYNA, N.: Uncertain Geography of the Local News and Civic Participation in New Media Era. In *Communication Today*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 79.

[9] WASCHKOVÁ CÍSAŘOVÁ, L.: Czech Local Press Content: When More is Actually Less. In *Communication Today*, 2016, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 105.

2. Methodology

With the research we aim to provide an overall view about the use of social media as an information source in the context of media coverage of local issues; the study is based on data gathered from Slovak and Ukrainian journalists. In order to provide an account of this phenomenon, we draw on an online questionnaire survey. This method was identified as the most suitable for data collection due to the following factors. Firstly, convenience. Through an online survey, respondents can answer the survey questionnaire at any time when internet access is available. Secondly, it is a short and quick way of gathering a lot of data from many people. Thirdly, this method provides accurate recording of respondents' answers. It is one of the most commonly used methods in the social sciences „*to gather data in a systematic way from a range of individuals, organizations, or other units of interest.*"[10] Moreover, online surveys are optimal in quarantine.

The survey was conducted among randomly sampled journalists based in two selected regions – Liptov (in Slovakia) and Lviv (in Ukraine) during March – May 2020. It should be noted that these regions are the subject of strong attention and focus by the media in their countries. As well as of local media, there are correspondents or correspondent offices and representations from all central media. Therefore, both local media reporters and journalists covering local news for national media were interviewed. In particular, among Slovak survey participants were those who worked for such all-Slovak media as the „Slovak Republic Press Agency", „Slovak Radio and Television", „Slovak News Agency" and television channels „TV Markíza" and „TA 3". Among Ukrainian respondents were employees of such central media as the Public Joint Stock Company „National Public Television and Radio Company of Ukraine", TV „24 Chanel", the National news agency of Ukraine „Ukrinform", the newspaper „Express", and the online media „Glavcom".

Thus, the sample of the study included journalists working for media outlets and covering local news at the time of the study. Invitations to take part in the survey and a link to the questionnaire presented in Google Forms were sent to the respondents' personal or corporate e-mails in both Slovak and Ukrainian languages respectively. In total, 28 people took part in the survey – 14 Slovak journalists and 14 of their Ukrainian counterparts. The participants in the survey were representatives of different media, both local and national; the media of various types, namely print, TV, radio, online; as well as various forms of ownership including private, municipal, joint-stock, and state-owned.

The survey questionnaire contains close-ended questions focusing on such categories as preferences, frequency of appeals, relevance and usefulness for respondents towards the local government communication and governments' social media use for information gathering. Participants were asked not only to answer the question but also to comment on the topic.

It is worth noting that the survey did not clarify respondents' characteristics such as gender and age. This is done for the following reasons. Firstly, gender. We suppose that these differences do not have a significant effect on the use of social media sites in professional work, neither nowadays nor in the future. Secondly, age. To date, there is already sufficient research on how age affects journalists' use of social media as a newsgathering resource, which confirms that younger journalists use social media more than older journalists.[11,12,13,14] Therefore, the work deals with another aspect, namely the study of the use of social media as a source of information

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[11] BRUNS, A., NUERNBERGK, C.: Political Journalists and Their Social Media Audiences: New Power Relations. In *Media and Communication*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 200.

[12] HEDMAN, U., DJERF-PIERRE, M.: The Social Journalist: Embracing the Social Media Life or Creating a New Digital Divide? In *Digital Journalism*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 376.

[13] ROGSTAD, I. D.: Political News Journalists in Social Media. In *Journalism Practice*, 2014, Vol. 8, No. 6, p. 699.

[14] WU, Y.: How Age Affects Journalists' Adoption of Social Media as an Innovation. A Multi-group SEM Analysis. In *Journalism Practice,* 2019, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 537.

by journalists from Ukraine and Slovakia. Although this is not a representative survey because the participant numbers are small for a rigorous comparative research design, it is still a better overview about the stated subject than the opinion of a single expert. In addition, this amount of respondents has been common for similar explorations of journalists' practice.[15],[16]

The survey, presented here, is part of a broader study of the topic. As social media are becoming an important part of journalistic work, their „*growing centrality in the news process warrants greater scrutiny from scholars and practitioners.*"[17] Our further research involves examining the materials of local media outlets of the two countries on how they aggregate social media content and include it in their journalistic products.

3. Findings and Discussion

According to the obtained data, it is entirely believed by both Slovak and Ukrainian journalists that the general public is interested in local news media stories on local matters and local self-government. Thus, respondents stressed the public's need for local news reporting, and noted it is necessary for audiences to receive journalistic materials from traditional media.

Nevertheless, social media is often considered as a tool for bypassing mainstream media, as social media allows maintaining direct contact with audiences without the involvement of traditional intermediaries.[18] However, this theory is not always true. Studies prove that the main target audiences for local officials' social media communication efforts are not citizens, but rather journalists. In fact, local politicians „*do not pursue a disintermediation strategy – they do not try to bypass journalism by directly addressing the public.*"[19] Conversely, officials primarily aim at getting journalists' attention and making their positions about relevant issues accessible to them. In other words, authorities may be attempting to leverage journalists as a means of getting information into traditional media. For government officials, the possibility of their social media posts „*being replicated in traditional media, thus reaching out to an even larger audience, is very appealing.*"[20] Hence, using social media, authorities rely on the news media „*to gain legitimacy and popularize their content.*"[21]

According to the survey, similar unanimity is found in answers to the question about the most popular ways of government communication for journalists' regular sourcing routines. Importantly, all surveyed practitioners most appreciate personal communication with officials as well as self-government sites on social media as tools to obtain information on local matters. The use of other news sources (official websites, press conferences, briefings, official meetings, e-mails, etc.) for obtaining government information is scarce, so the data are not provided in this article. According to the survey results, both Slovak and Ukrainian journalists primarily rely on social media and personal communication to find information on local matters. Hence, they are the two main tools of government communication as sources for reporting.

[15] BRANDTZAEG, P. B., CHAPARRO DOMÍNGUEZ, M. A.: A Gap in Networked Publics? A Comparison of Younger and Older Journalists' Newsgathering Practices on Social Media. In *Nordicom Review*, 2018, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 99.

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[17] MCGREGOR, S. C., MOLYNEUX, L.: Twitter's Influence on News Judgment: An Experiment Among Journalists. In *Journalism*, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 5, p. 597.

[18] LEV-ON, A.: The Anti-Social Network? Framing Social Media in Wartime. In *Social Media + Society,* 2018, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 3.

[19] BERNHARD, U., DOHLE, M.: Local Politics Online: The Influence of Presumed Influence on Local Politicians' Online Communication Activities in Germany. In *Local Government Studies,* 2015, Vol. 41, No. 5, p. 755.

[20] BROERSMA, M., GRAHAM, T.: Twitter as a News Source. In *Journalism Practice*, 2013, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 450.

[21] OWEN, D.: *The New Media's Role in Politics.* [online]. [2020-09-29]. Available at: <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/the-new-media-s-role-in-politics>.

In addition, respondents pointed out the indispensability of communication through social media in times of crisis, in particular the current coronavirus pandemic. *„Without this, I would not have been able to gather any information during restriction of interpersonal communication."* one Ukrainian counterpart wrote. At the same time, journalists listed the benefits of personal communication. One Slovak professional stated: *„I pay attention to personal communication. Personal conversation is important."* Likewise, one Ukrainian journalist noted: *„I need to see a person."* Thus, the survey results show the symbiotic use of traditional and new ways of sourcing practices: social media do not replace traditional journalistic newsgathering techniques such as face-to-face communication, but supplement them. Similar views prevail among researchers of the topic: social media are perceived mostly as a new tool for carrying out this traditional task.[22],[23]

There is one additional issue that can be interpreted from the survey. It should be noted that reporters from both countries are more likely to follow government pages on social media than official websites. The Slovak journalist commented: *„The official website is not flexible for a journalist's work. Municipalities, government officials and politicians have focused on social networks. They cover everything necessary there and use the official website only as a supplement. Experience shows that I learn official information from a social network, not from a website."* Other Slovak respondents wrote: *„More information is published on social networks than on websites"*; *„It is unthinkable for me to click on all websites and look for the latest information. In my work, I need to receive information from one place, so social media are now indispensable."* Ukrainian reporters reasoned that: *„Social media increases productivity, they are more convenient than official sites"*; *„Social networks are more important for gathering information"*; *„In my practice I prefer messages on social media to write news."* Most likely, such responses are due to the fact that social media, unlike „faceless" state websites, provide access to people, and leveraging these platforms offers enhanced opportunities to achieve public goals. Sometimes the information activity on the social network page is much greater than on the official site, being thus only a supplement.[24],[25]

When asked to assess the content of social media posts of local self-governments, most respondents considered it useful and relevant to professional reportage. Such views prevail among both Slovak and Ukrainian practitioners. In addition, taking into account the number of those who find local authorities' messages on social media platforms useful rather than useless, the result is that all respondents tend to find social media content valuable for professional news production. Slovak journalists commented: *„Social media websites are the beginning of work, they help create objective data for the public"*; *„They are excellent as a source of initial information"*. Likewise, Ukrainian professionals noted: *„I use posts from social networks, but I supplement them"*; *„The information from social media can be used as a starting idea for a further project."*

Respondents are also convinced of the credibility of the information found on local government's social media. To their mind, government sites on social media provide reliable information. At the same time, participants indicated in the comments: *„I usually take the information from those profiles I constantly follow and can see that they are true"*; *„I cannot be absolutely sure that any of the accounts are not broken"*; *„I use information if I am sure the page is run by the same organization or person."*

[22] HEDMAN, U., DJERF-PIERRE, M.: The Social Journalist. Embracing the Social Media Life or Creating a New Digital Divide? In *Digital Journalism*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 376.

[23] SKÄRLUND, S.: The Recycling of News in Swedish Newspapers: Reused Quotations and Reports in Articles about the Crisis in the Swedish Academy in 2018. In *Nordicom Review*, 2020, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 72.

[24] LANDSBERGEN, D.: Government as Part of the Revolution: Using Social Media to Achieve Public Goals. In *Electronic Journal of e-Government,* 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 136.

[25] HARMATIY, O.: Interactivity of Government Communications: Electronic Constituent. In *Science and Education a New Dimension. Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2015, Vol. III(9), No. 53, p. 41.

To tell the truth, social media as an information source have acquired a negative image and their use for news production creates challenges for the verification process. For instance, Facebook, as the most well-known social media site, has often been criticized in this area. *„It stems from the nature of the social network and freedom of expression. Despite the fact, that Facebook is, in essence, a space for the free sharing of information, various hoaxes, misinformation and false messages are often found on the social network site."*[26] However, in the case of governments, posting information on their pages is a demonstration of the position and recognition of the information as true a priori, so these institutions treat their messages with great responsibility. In this context, the use of such social media as a source for journalists is much more liberal. The danger of spreading false and fake information on government social media is minimized. Media lawyers argue that government institutions' accounts can be considered credible because *„there is a presumption of authenticity."*[27] Social media are supposed to be used as a reliable source if they are checked or verified sites of government organizations or officials, which constantly and systemically post on social media.[28] Nonetheless, it is always good to check information obtained from social media. This can be explained by two reasons at least. First, posts can be corrected or even deleted. Second, social pages can be hacked and anything can be written there. In view of this, it is necessary to check the information of which the veracity and accuracy is questionable, for example if the messages are not typical for government organizations, they contrast with previous posts in style and content or are very resonant or sensational, etc. However, the issue of verification is not only about reliability also but about balance. As social media are also tools for self-presentation, governments communicate presentational content there. Moreover, they may post one-sided or biased information, and the media, transmitting it, may disseminate an image beneficial to the government. All of this requires that journalists take a thoughtful and balanced approach, and present different opinions and points of view, especially on controversial issues. The use of social media platforms also makes the journalist play a gatekeeping role and filter information in order to detect events, processes, and trends, which are important and meaningful for the audiences. In short, journalists must adhere to the standards of credibility, accuracy, completeness, balance, and detachment that are the basics of professional ideology and fundamental to quality journalism.

On the other hand, which can be considered very essential, is that governments' social media provide journalists with the opportunity to collect additional data. Thanks to their democratic potential, these platforms offer convenient access to a plethora of potential news sources and make it possible for more voices to be heard.[29,30] As a result, journalists' social media sourcing enables learning about different opinions, attitudes, and views. Using social media, journalists receive starting ideas, clues and tips from citizens who read government posts, discuss them, point out advantages or disadvantages, comment and offer ideas, etc. Such information from ordinary residents helps identify issues that concern citizens, find out what people say and think, as well as plan ideas for their coverage in news stories or programs. As such, monitoring both government messages and user comments can provide journalists with insights into the public perception and mood that cannot be gotten otherwise. This allows the acquisition of new ideas for prospective news reporting.

[26] HOSSOVÁ, M.: Fake News and Disinformation: Phenomenons of Post-Factual Society. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research,* 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 32.

[27] TOLOKOLNIKOVA, K.: *Social Networks Have Long Been a Source of Information. What Should the Media Do?* [online]. [2020-07-12]. Available at: <https://detector.media/community/article/143795/2019-01-03-sotsmerezhi-davno-stali-dzherelom-informatsii-shcho-robiti-zmi>.

[28] *Social Networks: New Rules of Use in Journalistic Materials. Recommendations from IMI.* [online]. [2020-08-20]. Available at: <https://imi.org.ua/articles/sotsmerezhi-novi-pravyla-vykorystannia-v-zhurnalsts-kykh-materialakh-rekomendatsii-vid-imi-i71>.

[29] VON NORDHEIM, G., BOCZEK, K., KOPPERS, L.: Sourcing the Sources. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 7, p. 807.

[30] FLETCHER, R., SCHIFFERES, S., THURMAN, N.: Building the „Truthmeter": Training Algorithms to Help Journalists Assess the Credibility of Social Media Sources. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies,* 2020, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 19.

According to the survey, journalists from Slovakia and Ukraine most often use Facebook, which is significantly ahead of the others. Slovak respondents stated: *„I follow Facebook almost exclusively. I obtain information from there as an incentive to contact a specific person and check the information from the account in real life"*; *„To work, I need to have information available in one place. Everything is already reported mainly through Facebook."* Ukrainian respondents noted: *„Officials post on Facebook, and I take information there"*; *„The authorities write about everything they want to say on Facebook or Twitter."* This can be attributed to the use of social media by local authorities. According to our monitoring, all self-governments (except for very small villages) in the Liptov and Lviv regions (the territories where our research was conducted), use Facebook. Overall, in Slovakia, the majority of local self-governments use this social platform: 44,4% of towns and villages have an official Facebook account, almost 11% use unofficial accounts. Twitter is used by 0,7% of local self-governments, 2% of municipalities have accounts on other social networks.[31] Unfortunately, there are no similar statistics for Ukraine. However, research shows that Ukrainian local self-government units are increasingly turning to Facebook and are more active in using this social platform than others.[32] Besides, it also matters which social media is most used in these countries in general. Undoubtedly, the global trend is the growth of Facebook users. As it is by far the most popular in both Slovakia and Ukraine, it also attracts most journalists from these countries.[33,34]

Hence, the journalists involved in our study, acknowledge the contribution of self-government social media at the forefront of local affairs reporting. They utilise the information they get from these platforms as relevant for the professional context. Yet, it should not be excluded that turning to sites on social media may be caused by *„journalists' reliance on easily accessible information, rather than more fundamental democratic shifts in news reporting practices."*[35] At the same time, it is worth noting that the appeal of Slovak and Ukrainian journalists to social media sources is in line with the general trend in other countries as well. For example, sourcing is among the most common uses of social media for Irish journalists.[36] 88% of surveyed Swedish journalists reported that they used these platforms for sourcing stories during a typical week. Moreover, 27% conveyed that they published a story from information found in social media sources „every day" or „every week".[37] Social media are increasingly being used as sources in mainstream news coverage in Belgium.[38] The use of social media sources is also growing among South African journalists.[39] Generally, journalists of different countries rely on social media to stay connected to sources and real-time news.[40]

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[31] KALIŇÁK, M.: *ZMOS vie, koľko samospráv pri komunikácii využíva sociálne siete.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <https://www.zmos.sk/zmos-vie-kolko-samosprav-pri-komunikacii-vyuziva-socialne-siete--oznam/mid/405616/.html>.

[32] SHEVCHUK, I. B.: Communicative Possibilities of Regional Authorities in Social Networks. In *Black Sea Economic Studies*, 2018, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 175.

[33] *Social Media Stats Slovakia*. [online]. [2020-12-20]. Available at: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/slovakia>.

[34] *Social Media Stats Ukraine.* [online]. [2020-12-20]. Available at: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/ukraine>.

[35] WHEATLEY, D.: Victims and Voices: Journalistic Sourcing Practices and the Use of Private Citizens in Online Healthcare-system News. In *Journalism Studies*, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 8, p. 1017.

[36] HERAVI, B.: *Irish Journalists among World's Heaviest Social Media Users, Study Finds.* [online]. [2020-07-26]. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/irish-journalists-among-world-s-heaviest-social-media-users-study-finds-1.2101471>.

[37] GULYAS, A.: Hybridity and social media adoption by journalists. In *Digital Journalism*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 7, p. 892.

[38] PAULUSSEN, S., HARDER, R. A.: Social Media References in Newspapers. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as sources in newspaper journalism. In *Journalism Practice,* 2014, Vol. 8, No. 5, p. 542.

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[40] *Cision's State of the Media report 2019*. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <https://www.cisionjobs.co.uk/article/cision-s-state-of-the-media-report-2019>.

Moreover, representative surveys proves the high intensity and frequent usage of social networks and electronic communication by youngsters, which gives ground to conclude „*that social networks and „digital life" have a significant impact*" on the lives of young people.[41] Therefore, it can be argued that the social media usage in various spheres of life including professional journalism will continue to grow.

4. Conclusion

The usage of government information has deep traditions. Journalists primarily use it to reach „elite" sources with privileged access to events.[42] Government institutions belong to these kinds of sources, because they occupy high positions, have power and resources, determine the development of local communities and society as a whole, and influence the shaping of news media agendas. Moreover, „*given many of the temporal and resource-related newsroom pressures, the reliance on information subsidies and official or elite voices remains pervasive.*"[43]

Governments' social media sourcing is an effective and convenient way to obtain information from governments. Nowadays, journalists have incorporated social media into their regular sourcing routines. This changes the pattern of professional newsgathering practice and introduces social media into the structure of journalistic sources for their work. Local self-governments' sites are considered as appropriate platforms from which to obtain government information on local matters for media treatment.

Having conducted the survey and explored the scholarly studies we can conclude that social media is particularly important for reporters highlighting local issues due to their connectedness with the local communities and their links with local newsmakers. Indeed, the benefits of local self-governments' social media sites are their narrow approach and provision of local information. Because of the focus on local issues that is pertinent to the community, the content of self-government social sites is unique and no one else can provide it. Similarly, local news as an important means of original reporting performs such a special role that it cannot be replaced by others.

This study confirms that journalists primarily rely on self-government sites on social media as well as personal communication with officials as tools to obtain information on local matters. According to the obtained data, they are the main tools of government communication as sources for local reporting. In addition, the survey participants pointed out the indispensability of communication through social media in times of crisis (in particular, the current coronavirus pandemic). Hence, the results show the symbiotic use of traditional and new ways of information gathering practices: social media do not replace traditional journalistic news gathering techniques, but rather supplement them. Moreover, all respondents tend to find social media content valuable for professional news production. There is a prevailing opinion among both Slovak and Ukrainian journalism practitioners that content from social media sites of local self-government organizations is useful and relevant to the professional coverage of local issues. Furthermore, those surveyed are also convinced of the credibility of the information found on local self-government's social media. To their mind, local self-government's social media platforms provide reliable and credible information.

[41] ODZIOMKOVÁ, J.: Social Networks as the Dominant Platform for Communication between Young People. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research,* 2018, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 76.

[42] FLETCHER, R., SCHIFFERES, S., THURMAN, N.: Building the „Truthmeter": Training Algorithms to Help Journalists Assess the Credibility of Social Media Sources. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies,* 2020, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 20.

[43] WHEATLEY, D.: Victims and Voices: Journalistic Sourcing Practices and the Use of Private Citizens in Online Healthcare-system News. In *Journalism Studies*, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 8, p. 1017.

Therefore, journalists acknowledge the contribution of self-government social media in routine media coverage of local affairs. According to the survey results, the use of social media does not depend on the country in which the journalists live; the type of media for which they work for – print, TV, radio, online; the scale of media – national or local; or the form of ownership of the media – private, municipal, joint-stock, or state-owned. This study confirms that today's journalists actively utilize social media in their professional activities. It is evident that government agencies of all levels should apply modern communication tools, including the use of social media.

To summarize, usage of local self-governments' sites on social platforms as journalistic sources provides journalists with opportunities for informing and updating citizens on local issues. This is especially important in the context of democratic development and the public demand for greater openness and transparency of governance, as well as the growing role of self-governments in local environments within the framework of decentralization. The proper exploitation of the affordances and benefits of local self-governments' social media sites in the professional context helps journalists to extend their agenda, report in a timely manner, provide substantial and diverse local information on relevant topics, and reflect local people's lives. All this together contributes to the quantity and quality of local news, and the vitality of local communities and grassroots democracy.

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