Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

Front Pages

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ATINER is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. ATINER is an independent and non-profit Association with a Mission to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Both these historic places are within walking distance from ATINER's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens"…is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War). It is ATINER's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in ATINER's name.

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The *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC)* is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas from mass media and communication. The Journal encourages the submission of works that engages issues of international scope and that explore matters of theoretical importance across a diverse range of topics from journalism, to strategic communication, to economics, public policy, politics and technological change as they relate to media and society. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the **Mass Media & Communication Unit** of the **Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)**. All papers are subject to ATINER's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

The Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Editorial and Reviewers' Board

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The current issue is the fourth of the seventh volume of the *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC), published by the Mass Media & Communication Unit of ATINER.*

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
ATINER

Athens Institute for Education and Research
A World Association of Academics and Researchers

20th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 9-12 May 2022, Athens, Greece

The Mass Media & Communication Unit of ATINER organizes its **20th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 9-12 May 2022, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of Communications, Mass Media and other related disciplines. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2022/FORM-MED.doc).

Important Dates
- Abstract Submission: **29 March 2022**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **11 April 2022**

Academic Members Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. John Pavlik**, Head, Mass Media and Communication Research Unit, ATINER & Professor, Rutgers University, USA.

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Where Have All the Stories and Voices Gone in Local Newspapers? The Effect Falling Advertising Revenues and the Rise of the Web Have Had on English Regional Newspapers

By Richard Bowyer[*]

The regional newspaper industry in the UK is in freefall with sales down more than 60 percent in 10 years. With this decline has come cost-cutting. This study looks at how these cuts have manifested themselves in terms of the number of news stories now being printed in newspapers and the number of local people being quoted in the newspapers. The study has looked at a number of regional newspapers across 30 years to show the effect of the changing face of the newspaper business as the audience and advertising have moved online. The research includes interviews with experts on whether story count mattered and if fewer stories and local voices have damaged the product. This paper finds that generally newspaper companies with a web-first culture have been forced to reduce their local news content in their printed products as they concentrate their resources online. While fewer stories and voices cannot be blamed for the complete demise of the newspapers, it is a consequence of cost-cutting and disadvantages the product. Opinions do vary on the needs for high story count, but this paper shows that most experts believe it is important and that without it, printed newspapers have been damaged.

Keywords: newspapers, regional, decline, stories, quotes

Introduction

Newspapers used to pride themselves in having dozens of local stories in the newspaper. During the 80s, 90s and 00s, there was a "value for money" mantra, with some editors keen to give readers as many stories as possible. There are few academic texts which refer to story count, but of those found the view is that fewer stories as being a bad thing without any real supporting evidence. Franklin and Murphy (1998, p. 15) suggest that editors realised they were battling to get readers to buy newspapers for the cover price so packed the newspaper full of "soundbites or word bites, we are catering for a public which has a grasshopper mentality" it goes onto say "you go for a big read and keep the story count as high as possible to keep the audience's attention". Also, in a critique of free newspapers, it is inferred that the newspapers have a low story count, effectively, an implied criticism of the product (Franklin and Murphy, 1998, p. 138).

With fewer stories in a newspaper, the number of people quoted will inevitably fall. As a rule of thumb, some, but not all newspaper editors tended to look for a

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[*]Senior Lecturer, University of Derby, UK.

minimum of three quotes per story to create balance. The "three quote" rule derives from the Watergate scandal in which journalists Woodward and Bernstein had an "unwritten rule" that they would not publish unless there was two additional sources confirmed to support the original source, it became known as the "three source rule" (Harcup, 2015, p. 86). The key reason for fewer stories in newspaers falls at the feet of a shift in emphasis from print to online. According to Jenkins and Kleis Nielsen (2018), advertising was the most important source of revenue for many local newspapers and because they were the main or only publication in most communities, they were powerful and operated as profitable businesses. This business model has changed with advertisers investing in the web, which is dominated by large US-based platform companies that offer low prices, precise targeting, and unduplicated reach such as Facebook and Google. This has led to the trade body for newspapers in the UK, News Association, to ask for greater transparency about advertising revenues obtained by these firms on the back of existing news organisations (Jenkins and Kleis Nielsen, 2018). Furthermore, in the wake of criticism over the damage caused to local and national journalism by these companies, they have both created schemes to help pay for journalism in the UK (Nilsson, 2019; Waterson, 2018). However, local newspapers still cannot compete directly, and online, their traditional business model, advertising, is challenged. According to the Cairncross Review (Cairncross, 2019) more than 300 local newspapers have closed and the number of frontline print journalists has dropped by 6,000 in the past decade from 23,000 to 17,000. The report also revealed print advertising revenues have dropped by more than half over the last 10 years, from nearly £7 billion to just over £3 billion. According to (Hill, 2016) providing news and comment, which had always been the preserve of the print media was unshackled by the internet, which led to sales of newspapers reducing drastically, which in turn hit advertising revenues, leading to a reduction in income. Due to the fact that newspapers relied so heavily on advertising, on average 80 per cent for regional newspapers, the movement of this advertising income away from newspapers to online meant that printed media was left in a dire financial position (Hill, 2016). According to (Hill, 2016), the only way around the dilemma was to raise the cover price of the newspaper to make up for the shortfall in income. However, this could not be done quick enough to fill the income gap, so newspapers were left with only one option, cost-cutting. The situation is similar in the United States where the loss of journalism jobs and 20 per cent of newspaper closures are blamed on the stranglehold Facebook and Google have on online advertising income (Lipman, 2019).

Jenkins and Kleis Nielsen (2018) state that the need for local news organisations, particularly newspapers, to adapt to these trends and demonstrate their relevance while facing declining advertising revenues, circulation rates, and staff sizes has resulted in a perfect storm for layoffs, buyouts, and even closures. A further consequence of this is the move to online first, as demonstrated by Trinity Mirror, now Reach Plc, (Reid, 2014). In this document the move to digital-first was described by the then editorial director of Trinity Mirror, Neil Benson, as crossing the "Rubicon". What this effectively meant was that content was prepared first for online before being put into the newspaper. It also highlights a shift in

emphasis in terms of staffing numbers with a smaller print unit created sitting next to a larger online department. The result of this online first policy is that putting together a paper in less time with fewer people has led to a reduction in stories and the time to quote a larger number of people. Some local pages have also been lost in daily newspapers to centralised content pages being used to provide content in the paper. According to Sharman (2017) Trinity Mirror made 40 staff redundant in a plan to use more shared content which included the creation of ready-made pages with generic content. As an aside, while regional newspapers have had to reduce story count to cope with the demands of online this void has to a certain extent been filled by hyper-local websites (Harte, 2017). Another reason for the reduction in stories is that production and subbing staff have been at the heart of job cuts in newspapers with the need for content creators, but not content refiners. According to Nel (2010) in a report on job losses in the newspaper industry almost a quarter of those who lost their jobs were sub-editors, the biggest group. The other part of this research looked at the number of quotes in stories. Quotes are important to the story and bring it to life (Pape and Featherstone, 2005, p. 38). They add that the quotes bring a news story to life and "add human interest and authenticity", "quotations are the life force of a news story. They bring direct human impact into what otherwise runs the risk of becoming a dry series of factual statements". (Reeves, 2015, p. 121)

According to Spark and Harris (1997, p. 66) quotes add to the accuracy of a story and provide the reader with original information to "form their views". Also, direct and indirect quotes make it clear to the reader the source of the information. In an updated version, Spark and Harris (2016, p. 55) add that no report with more than 100 words is complete without a quote. Furthermore, words from an eyewitness tell a story in a "fresher, simpler" and more "moving" than a journalist telling the story themselves. Telling a story is all about balance and as mentioned earlier accuracy which can come from quotes. Accuracy according to Harcup (2015, p. 76) is described as the single most important part of journalism and adds that little else really matters. Of course, this is often easier said than done and there is a warning from Spark and Harris (2016, p. 194) that in the cost-cutting environment of newspapers, the expectation that journalists should write more content which is less likely to be checked making accuracy harder to ensure. Also, it is vital to remember the Editors' Code of conduct (IPSO, 2018) which journalists adhere to and refers to accuracy and the need for the press not to publish inaccurate information. The reason accuracy has been raised here is that while eyewitnesses can provide different information, the correlation between the stories helps to build the picture of the story.

Methodology

Five newspapers were chosen for this initial study (see Table 1). They are from four different regional daily newspaper groups from various parts of the country. The papers chosen were the *Derby Telegraph*, the *Express and Star*, *Wolverhampton*, *Sheffield Star*, *Norwich News* and *Newcastle Chronicle*. The

Derby Telegraph and the *Newcastle Chronicle* are from the biggest regional newspaper group in the UK, Reach Plc (Reach Plc, 2019). The idea of choosing two newspapers from one group was to add an internal comparison for the research, to note whether the same reduction in stories and people quoted was a company-wide policy. The cities the newspapers serve have similar populations with the exception of Sheffield, which is larger; Derby (pop: 262,971); Wolverhampton (pop: 240,937); Sheffield (pop: 541,763); Norwich (pop: 195, 971); Newcastle-upon-Tyne (pop: 282,708), (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

Table 1. Figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC, 2019) and which also Appeared in the Trade Publication UK Press Gazette (Mayhew, 2017a)

Newspaper name	Newspaper owner	Newspaper sales December 2018	Average daily online unique users June 2017
Derby Telegraph	Reach Plc	15,029	92,858
Express and Star	Midland News Association	38,690	98,733*
Sheffield Star	JPI Media (now National World)	12,609	101,055
Norwich News	Archant	25,631	19,235
Newcastle Chronicle	Reach Plc	19,259	297,527

Note: Midland News Association, owners of the *Express &Star*, is not independently audited for web audience figures; however, MNA figures put average daily unique users for April 2017 at 98,733 on expressandstar.com.

The newspapers chosen to review during this period were for the years 1998, 2008 and 2018. It was decided that three days' worth of each newspaper would be looked at in May covering all of those years. The newspapers viewed were the final editions of each newspaper. Copies looked at were Monday, Wednesday and Friday. To get an idea of the volume of stories and for accuracy, stories not counted were in any features, supplements, any national news (unless localised), any national sports stories, advertising features, letters. Effectively, the stories had to original local news stories/news features. Pape and Featherstone (2005) describe local news as only being news if it happens in the right place or area. This is reinforced by Spark and Harris (2010, p. 2) who say that editors create a framework for a publications' new judgements so a "local newspaper will concentrate on local people". The stories described here were the ones that were counted for this paper. Not only were the stories counted, but also the number of local voices in the stories. National representatives of big organisations were not counted, but a local person speaking for a national organisation was counted. Also, the number of pages carrying local news stories has been counted to reflect if there is any change in paginations.

The research methods employed were both qualitative and quantitative. According to Dawson (2002) qualitative research explores "attitudes, behaviour and experiences through different methods including interviews". In this research

there are a number of interviews with industry experts talking about story count and quotes. According to Tracy (2019) a phrase which is used to class this sort of research is grounded theory. This means that rather than tackling the data with "pre-existing theories" the researcher collects data and analyses it line-by-line creating themes from the data rather than adding ready-made themes to the outcomes (Tracy, 2019, p. 30). Also, this paper involves quantitative, because a number of newspapers were examined generating statistics (Dawson, 2002). To support this Neuman (2007) describes the research data as quantitative, an expression in numbers or qualitative, an expression in words, visual images, sounds, or objects. The quantitative research method used was stratified sampling because a controlled sample of newspapers was selected. According to Neuman (2007) this form of research guarantees representativeness or fixes the proportion of different strata within a sample. In general, stratified sampling produces samples that are more representative than simple random sampling if the stratum information is accurate.

The second part of this research was focused on talking to industry experts about the value of story count to a newspaper. For example, my findings show that some newspapers had a low story count in 1998 and there was a general feeling among some newspaper editors that story count was not the golden nugget to achievement. I spoke to four experts who have been involved in the newspaper industry. Three of them did not have a direct connection to the research. They were Peter Sands, a former editor and then editorial trainer for Sands Media Services and well-known commentator on the industry and a journalist for more than 40 years; Mike Sassi, former editor of the *Notts Post*, and a journalist for more than 30 years; Mark Charlton, former night editor *Leicester Mercury*, who was a journalist for more than 15 years and is now Head of Public Engagement at de Montford University. The fourth expert I spoke to was Martin Wright, Editor-in-chief Midland News Association. His newspaper was part of the research and the reason I asked him to be involved was so we could discuss the results because his newspaper tended to buck the trend in terms of reduced story count and local voices. In Appendix A are the questions asked to the experts.

Background

The recent Cairncross Review, commissioned by the UK Government and headed by Dame Frances Cairncross, into a sustainable future for high-quality journalism highlighted the issues facing both the regional and national press. Figures from the report show that print sales of national and local printed newspapers have fallen by roughly half between 2007–2008 and 2017–2018 (Mayhew, 2019a). The report highlighted that the sales of national newspaper print editions had fallen from 11.5m daily copies in 2008 to 5.8m in 2018 and regional newspapers from 63.4m weekly copies in 2007 to 31.4m in 2017 (Cairncross, 2019). Other key figures show that print advertising revenues have fallen by 69 per cent in a decade and the number of frontline journalists in the industry fell from about 23,000 in 2007 to 17,000 in 2019. The consequences are highlighted by

Waterson (2020) who describes that during the last decade newspaper groups have merged, staff laid off and offices closed in a final effort to cut costs. He adds that the result of these cuts is often a "single junior regional reporter left trying to fill a town's newspaper".

Story Count: *Derby Telegraph* and *Newcastle Chronicle*

Graph 1. The *Derby Telegraph* 1998–2018 Showing the Number of Local News Stories, Local Pages and Local People
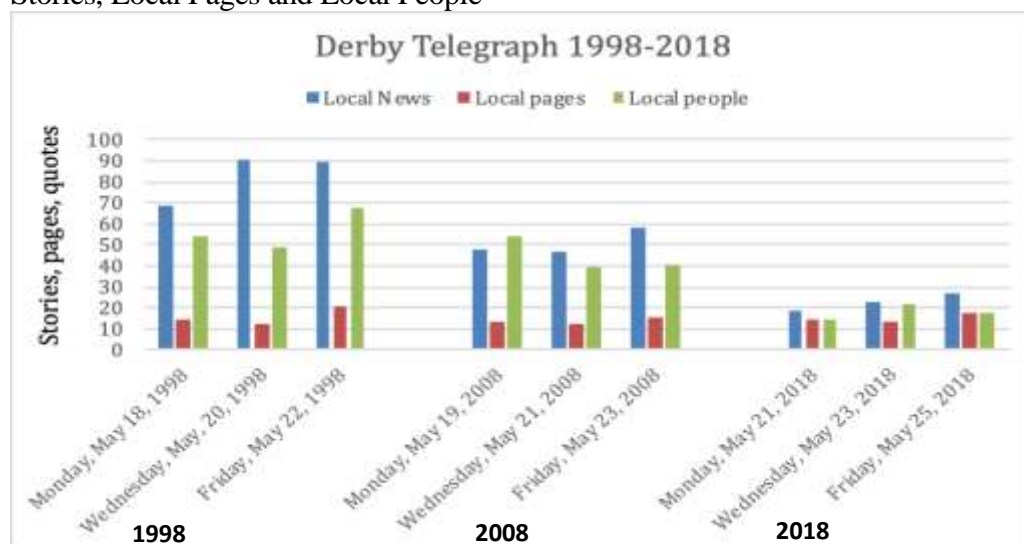
Graph 2. The *Newcastle Chronicle* 1998–2018 Showing the Number of Local News Stories, Local Pages and Local People
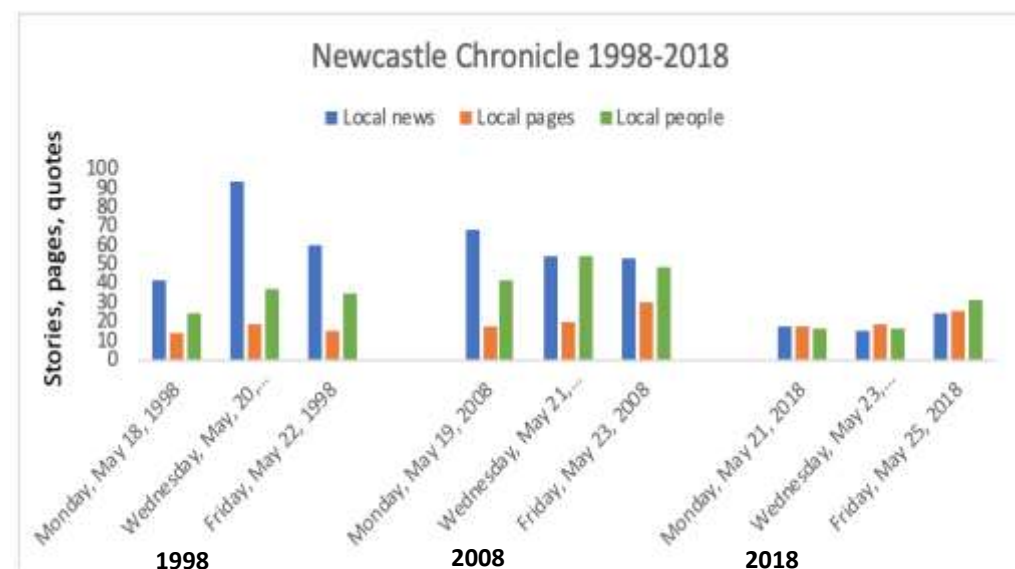
Both of these newspapers belong to the Reach Plc group, formerly Trinity Mirror. During the 1990s Derby was owned by Northcliffe Newspapers before

being later sold to Local World then Trinity Mirror Sweney (2016), which later became Reach Plc (BBC News, 2018). The *Chronicle* was owned by Thomson before being sold to TM in 1995 (Lambourne, 2014). In 1998, with different owners, there was a similar philosophy. The *Telegraph* is packed with stories (see Graph 1), up to 90 a day and there are also a lot of local people quoted, just under 68 on one day when there were 21 local news pages. The *Chronicle* (see Graph 2) also had a high number of stories, 94 one day, but the number of local voices was lower, 38 being the highest. With the high number of stories in the *Telegraph* in 1998, there is a decline in 2008, with the highest number of stories in the three days at 58 compared with the lowest in 1998 which was 69. There is still a decent number of local voices in the newspaper with a high of 54, which is bigger than the lowest number in 1998 which is 49. In line with other newspapers in this sample group, the *Chronicle* in 2008 still had a high story count, a maximum of 69 in one edition, and its local voices on all three days was higher than 1998, with 42, 55 and 49 people quoted compared with 25, 38 and 35 in 1998. However, the major difference can be seen in 2018 for both newspapers. The *Telegraph* local story count has dropped to between 19 and 27 and the local voices between 15 and 22. This is a dramatic change from the height of 1998 with 90 stories and 60 people quoted. Similarly, the *Chronicle* figures for 2018 show that the number of local stories has dropped to between 16 and 25 from 42 to 94 in 1998 and 54 to 69 in 2008. The number of local voices has also fallen from highs of between 42 to 55 in 2008 to 17 to 32 in 2018.

Sheffield Star

Graph 3. The *Sheffield Star* 1998–2018 Showing the Number of Local News Stories, Local Pages and Local People
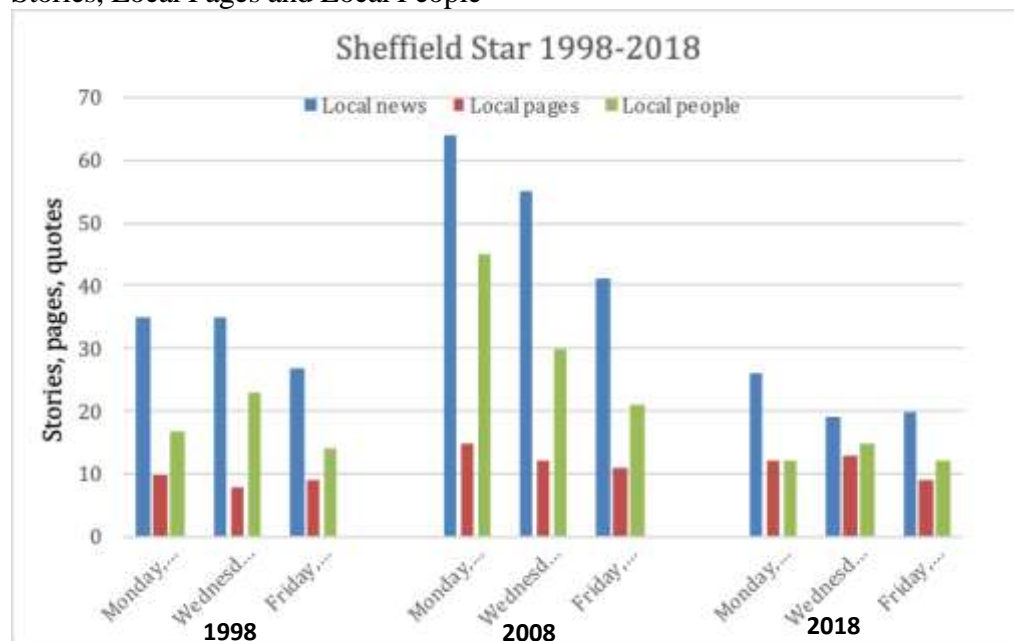
The newspaper is owned by the newly-created JPIMedia, which bought the newspapers from Johnston Press after agreeing to wipe out £135m of the company's debts in return for control of the business (Linford, 2018). JPI was recently sold in December 2020 to National World, which is run by David Montgomery who was behind Local World, which was bought by Reach Plc (Ponsford, 2020). In 1998 (see Graph 3) the number of pages set aside for local news was comparatively low, between eight and 10 and this reflects on the number of stories which peaked at 35 and went down to 27. The number of local voices was between 14 and 23. In 2008 the newspaper had more local news pages and the number of stories rose to 64, 55 and 41 and local people quoted 45, 30 and 21, compared with 17, 23 and 14 in 1998. Once again 10 years later there is a decline in 2018 from 2008. In 2018 the number of local stories was 26, 19, 20 and voices 12, 15, 12, a large drop from 2008 and a smaller drop from 1998. This differential between 1998 and 2018 is explored further in the discussion on the *Norwich News*.

Norwich News

Graph 4. Norwich News 1998–2018 Showing the Number of Local News Stories, Local Pages and Local People
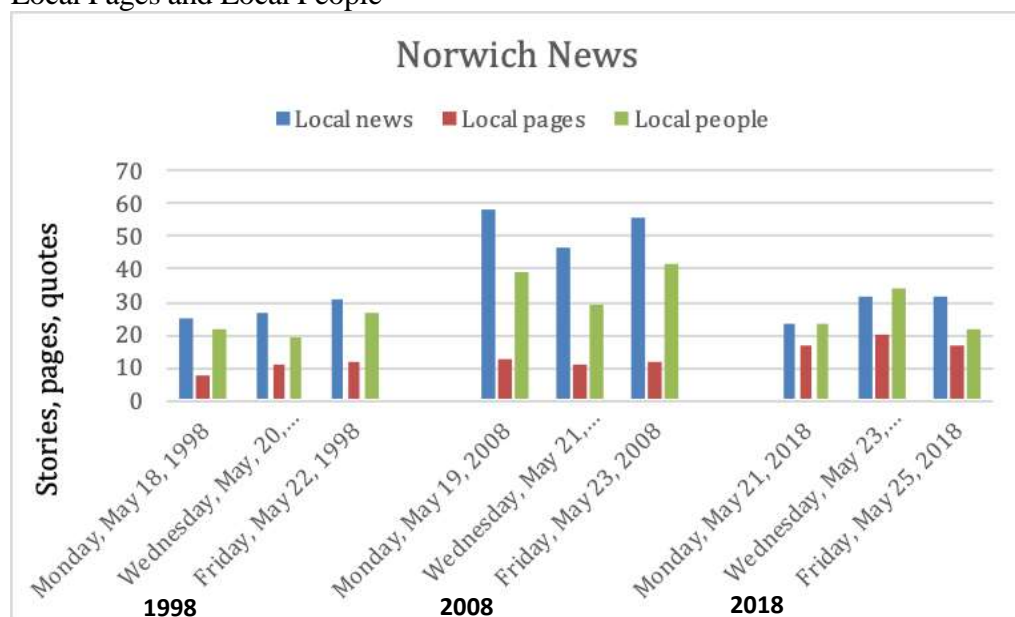
The newspaper is owned by Archant Group. It was part of the Eastern Counties Newspapers Group but the company changed its name to Archant to have broader appeal around the country in 2002 (Archant, 2019). This paper follows a similar pattern to the *Sheffield Star* with an increase in content in 2008, but either side of this date there are fewer stories and voices. In terms of story count and local voices, the greatest parallel between eras is 1998 and 2018. In 1998 there were 25, 27, 31 new stories compared with the 2018 figures of 23, 32, 32. The number of local voices in 1998 was 22, 19, 27, compared with 23, 34, 22. Once again this makes the steepest decline in content from 2008 to 2018. In 2008 there were 58, 47, 56 news stories and 39, 29, 42 local voices. The question to be

asked was why the Norwich and Sheffield newspapers had a lower story count in 1998? In 2018 the issue around fewer stories and voices is concerned around the reduction in staff and emphasis for web first, in 1998 there was a movement in some areas of the regional press to lead by design and not story count. This is supported by Paul (2020), a freelance editorial designer and lecturer, who helped to re-design the *Norwich News* in 2004. He suggests that the reason for fewer stories in the *News* in the late 1990s was possibly due to the desire to change the feel of newspapers, with an emphasis of bigger headlines and photographs as they changed with the times and technology. It was also believed that that lifestyle and leisure content should be more prominent which probably meant the emphasis was less on news and more on feature/life-style content. So the newspaper did have a lot of content, but it was not necessary the type of content considered by this research. Paul (2020) added that with the introduction of colour, newspapers were becoming brighter and breezier, with less emphasis on high story content. Frost (2012) supports this idea by suggesting that story counts are a consideration when designing pages. For example, if the design calls for bigger headlines and photographs, the pages will reflect this by having fewer stories. Berry (2004) states that newspapers redesign frequently to sharpen their identities with readers and out of necessity to meet economic pressures and changes in technology. This means that changing the look is often due to new approaches to production and also the economic pressures applied from competition, either other print products or the web and TV (Berry, 2004). Also how a newspaper looks depends on how the senior editorial team perceive the readership whether that is big sans serif capital letters for headlines, thick rules to restrained headline sizes and background panel boxes (Berry, 2004).

Wolverhampton Express &Star

Graph 5. Express & Star 1998–2018 Showing the Number of Local News Stories, Local Pages and Local People
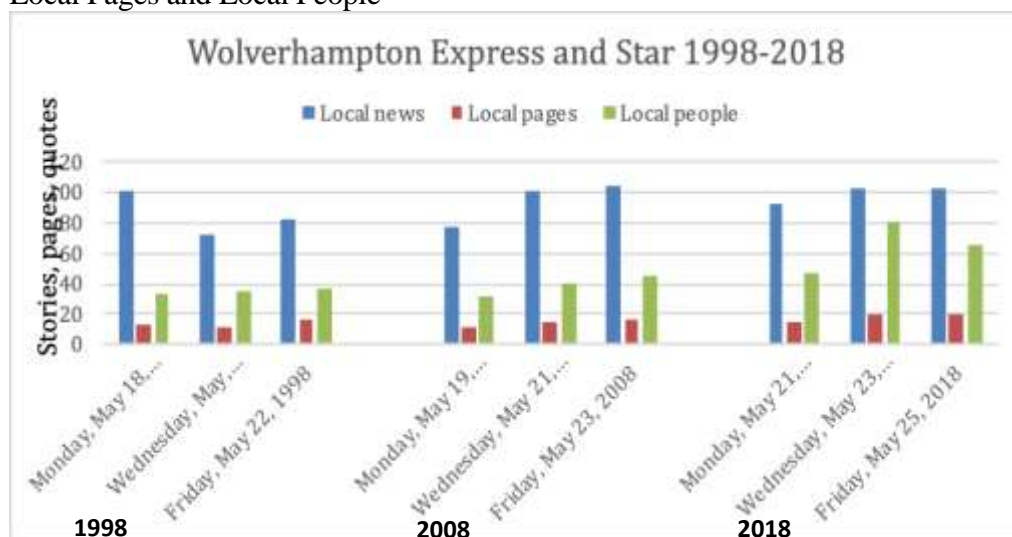
The newspaper is owned by Midland News Association. The paper was founded in the city in the 1880s by the Scottish-American millionaire Andrew Carnegie and a group of radical Liberal Party members, including Thomas Graham. The *Express & Star* has steadily overtaken its rivals to become the biggest-selling regional evening newspaper in Britain outside London (Archant, 2019). This newspaper bucks the trends because today there are more local stories and more local people quoted than in the previous years (see Graph 5). The newspaper policy of having a high number of national and international stories throughout the paper has changed to a concentration of local news. Its local story count has been incredibly consistent **1998:** 101, 72, 83; **2008:** 77, 101, 107; **2018:** 93, 102, 103. The number of local voices has also gone up which reflects the decline in national and international stories in the newspaper. For example, the number of national news stories in the Monday edition of the newspaper was 64 in 1998 which dropped to 52 in 2008 and 19 in 2018. This move to fewer national stories and a greater emphasis on local stories is reflected in the move of the newspapers to overnight production. At the time, the then editor Keith Harrison admitted there would be fewer national stories as the organisation shed 76 staff as part of this process (Linford, 2014). However, what we can see is a concentration on the production of local news stories which is reflected in the consistently high local story count.

Qualitative Research Questions and Answers (See Appendix A for Questions)

According to Sassi (2019)[1] during his time as a trainee reporter in the 1980s the biggest complaint he received was that there was "nothing in the paper". He firmly believed that readers needed to get value for money and this came from story count. He added that while some editors obsessed with having as many pages as possible, he was more concerned with packing the newspaper full of stories. Sassi (2019)[2] said he simply wanted every edition of his paper to carry at least 100 local (no national) news excluding sports, features and business stories. The theory was that local people wanted to read about their friends and neighbours – the streets where they live, the places that they shop and the schools where their children are pupils, he said. Sassi (2019)[3] added that he did not think this formula was detrimental to the newspapers because he felt the more stories you gave readers thee more they would want to read on. According to Sands (2018)[4] the mantra of the 1980s–1990s was high story count. He said that it came out of the desire to provide readers value as paginations decreased. However, he felt that the content used to fill the papers was of such poor quality that it would drive readers away. Charlton (2019)[5] agreed that there an emphasis on story count in the past, although he did not believe it was detrimental to the newspaper. He added that the theory was that the more stories, the more chance there was of a reader finding

[1]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.
[2]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.
[3]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.
[4]Peter Sands Interview 2018.
[5]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.

more items of interest. The belief in high story count is supported in what was asked for at the *Leicester Mercury* at one time which was a maximum of eight paragraphs per story unless it was exceptional. This ensured that the number of stories on a page was high. Wright (2019)[6] said that it is in the culture of the Express and Star to maintain high story count. He added that if a newspaper only had 20 to 30 local stories in and few local voices in, it was difficult to sell.

According to Wright (2019)[7] and Sassi (2019)[8], story count was the key to selling newspapers and that it mattered that the number of stories and voices were high. Sassi (2019)[9] said that "in simple terms, the more stories you give readers, the more chance you have of persuading them to read on". This was echoed by Wright who said without story count the newspaper was hard to sell. Charlton (2019)[10] was of the opinion that five really well-written interesting pieces is better than 10 not-so well-written and not-so interesting stories. However, he added that what one person finds interesting, another does not. The number of stories does matter, although within the parameters on a well-designed and constructed page that is easy on the eye (Charlton, 2019)[11]. However, quality over quantity was the bedrock of a newspaper, according to Sands (2018)[12]. According to Sands (2018)[13] it was all too easy to fill the columns with press releases, fillers and council minutes. Often there were columns of local stories most of which were irrelevant to the readership. If there was a story about choir practice, did anyone care, so the only people it did interest were members of the choir and they did not because they already knew when practice was on (Sands, 2018)[14]. Sands (2018)[15] added that newspapers "deluded" themselves into thinking that putting a strong headline on a diary event offered value for money so the desire for high story count could turn readers away.

There are many reasons for the rapid decline in newspapers and their readership but one of the biggest must be that most daily papers now carry less than one third of the truly local news stories that would have once (Sassi, 2019)[16]. He added that too many readers think there's nothing in their local paper. According to Charlton (2019)[17] there is no doubt that there are fewer local stories in the newspapers but this was down to logistics rather than a principle. He added that newspapers have much fewer staff today than they did 10 years ago, an estimated 6,500 regional jobs have been lost since 2005 (Hutton, 2018). The *Leicester Mercury's* editorial department was just over 100 in 2008 before the various rounds of redundancies (Charlton, 2019)[18], it is now 40 or even slightly

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[6]Martin Wright Interview 2019.

[7]Martin Wright Interview 2019.

[8]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.

[9]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.

[10]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.

[11]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.

[12]Peter Sands Interview 2018.

[13]Peter Sands Interview 2018.

[14]Peter Sands Interview 2018.

[15]Peter Sands Interview 2018.

[16]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.

[17]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.

[18]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.

less. It is quite clear that this reduction cannot sustain the same level of story count as in the past. Also, the move towards digital newsrooms now means that, in nearly every centre, the newspaper is literally an "after thought". The *Express & Star* is one paper which has bucked the trend and has changed its philosophy of the 1990s and early 2000s to produce more local news stories in the paper. Every newspaper has had to make changes to their staffing, staffing numbers are down from the 1990s, according to (Wright, 2019)[19]. To fulfil the mantra of the newspaper to maintain story count, the company has attempted to be more efficient on the production side to maintain levels of reporting.

> "The introduction of template pages has allowed us to scale back on the production which allows the level of reporting to be the best we can do. We believe value for money involves a large range of stories. If someone is paying 75p during the week and 90p at the weekend we believe we have to maintain story levels to offer value for money" (Wright, 2019)[20].

According to (Wright, 2019)[21] there were fewer local stories in the early periods of this research paper because readers used to rely on the *Express &Star* to provide national news stories. However, with news around the world available within seconds, the paper had made a concerted bid to provide more local, exclusive stories than have national and international stories on its pages.

Reporters now mainly write for the website and their stories are re-packaged (cut and pasted) for the newspaper (Charlton, 2019)[22]. This he said further impacts on the number of stories as reporters are asked to concentrate on stories with "the numbers" and often need to sort out live updates, video, pictures, Facebook Live and even, on occasions, audio for some of those stories. All of this impacts on the number of stories that can be physically produced. The move towards online means that some content is "not suitable" for the newspaper as reporters may be producing generic content, which could even be re-written national stories, simply to capitalise on trending stories. Reach Plc newspapers in Leicester, Nottingham and Derby have a team (The Trending Unit) doing this on a daily basis for the three websites of the cities. This again takes more staff away from the business of writing stories (Charlton, 2019)[23]. He added that the reduction in story count is by necessity, not invention. For example, when he worked in Leicester, a senior sub-editor fills the back of the newspaper without any newsdesk or reporter involvement from press releases and information contributed by email. There are fewer local stories in regional newspapers and this was due to diminishing resources and the focus of the resources which are left to the publishing online first (Sassi, 2019)[24]. He said that the biggest battle was between quality and quantity and that with fewer staff errors and mistakes crept in with the quantity required. Add this to the demands of the needs for more commercial journalism and to feed

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[19]Martin Wright Interview 2019.
[20]Martin Wright Interview 2019.
[21]Martin Wright Interview 2019.
[22]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.
[23]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.
[24]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.

the website something had to give and the victim was story count and the concentration of efforts on the newspaper. Many newspapers decrease the number of stories they have put into their newspapers, but the *Express &Star* stands out for going the other way, ensuring story count is high and full of local news. The company believed in maintaining story count to offer value for money with the newspaper costing 75p in the week and 90p at the weekend (Wright, 2019)[25].

All of the experts firmly believed that local voices in newspapers were an essential part of the regional newspaper. According to (Charlton, 2019)[26] there are fewer voices in newspapers and the problem is a time factor with reporters not having enough time to speak directly to people and relying more and more on social media to "lift" quotes, often these people unknown to the report with vague pseudonyms. He added that more readers relate to real people quoted with a name, age, occupation and an address. The more people quoted, the more chance people actually have of knowing someone in the newspaper and that brings a connection. Balance is important in news stories and this was obtained by talking to people about the subject according to Sassi (2019)[27] and this was echoed by (Wright, 2019)[28] who believes that sending reporters out on stories and talking to local people was essential for the collation of balanced news reports. Names and pictures of local people were big sellers (Sands, 2018)[29] and if you were in the paper, the whole street knew about it. There is certainly a danger of an increasing disconnect between communities and their paper if it is full of rent-a-quote councillors and corporate types. Perhaps real people are more likely to be found in the increasing number of hyperlocal independent titles which tend to be out and about in the community (Sands, 2018)[30].

Empirical Investigation into Story Count and Quotes in Regional Newspapers: Results

What this study was attempting to achieve was to show the effect on the production of local news and time pressure to ensure local voices were in the newspaper as they moved away from print to online. With the number of newspaper closures at 245 titles since 2005 (Mayhew, 2019b) and according to Hutton (2018) regional editorial staff numbers halved to 6,500 during the same period with staff cuts, centralised newsrooms and cuts in production teams, how newspapers are produced has drastically changed. As a general rule, it is clear that the number of stories in the papers sampled and the number of voices in them has declined. This is shown in the figures for *Derby Telegraph* and *Newcastle Chronicle* which shows high story count and voices in 1998 and 2008 and a serious decline in 2018. Both *Norwich* and *Sheffield* show that stories and quotes

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[25]Martin Wright Interview 2019.
[26]Mark Charlton Interview 2019.
[27]Mike Sassi Interview 2019.
[28]Martin Wright Interview 2019.
[29]Peter Sands Interview 2018.
[30]Peter Sands Interview 2018.

are similar in numbers between 1998 and 2018, but show a sharp decline from 2008. What maybe key here is that in 1998 a choice may have been made to have fewer stories on design-based led pages, but the decline from 2008 to 2018 is based around changing working practices and fewer staff. The Wolverhampton *Express & Star* is an anomaly with a fairly consistent story count and in 2018 a large amount of local voices as discussed earlier which was introduced as the newspaper went to overnight printing. The charts below (see Table 2) look at the sales figures and the cost of the newspapers during the period of the research to add context to the discussion.

Table 2. The Newspaper Sales and Cost of the Newspapers Used during this Research

Newspaper name	Date	Sales figure	Cost of paper
Express &Star	December 1998	186,969	30p
Norwich News	December 1998	36,458	30p
Derby Telegraph	December 1998	60,691	29p
Sheffield Star	December 1998	84,948	28p
Newcastle Chronicle	December 1998	109,685	26p
Newspaper name	**Date**	**Sales figure**	**Cost of paper**
Express &Star	December 2008	130,216	38p
Norwich News	December 2008	21,030	40p
Derby Telegraph	December 2008	35,152	35p
Sheffield Star	December 2008	47,216	40p
Newcastle Chronicle	December 2008	67,103	42p
Newspaper name	**Date**	**Sales figure**	**Cost of paper**
Express &Star	June 2018	42,208	70p
Norwich News	June 2018	6,765	80p
Derby Telegraph	June 2018	16,785	65p
Sheffield Star	June 2018	13,658	78p
Newcastle Chronicle	June 2018	20,756	75p

Source: Figures provided by ABC (2019).

Conclusion

The regional newspaper business buried its head in the sand for a decade before finally realising that the internet was a direct threat to their print business and something had to be done. Newspaper editors around the country fought hard during the 90s to protect the printed product, after all, many of them received bonuses based on performance of the newspaper, so why would they embrace the web when they feared it would steal their readers? By 2007 the game was up. Advertising, the core income of the business, up to 80 per cent for many regional newspapers, moved to the web leaving the profitable businesses needing to find a solution to the loss in revenue. The issue the newspapers had was how to make up for the lost income? The obvious path was to increase cover price, but the amount the printed products could rise at anyone time could not be done quickly enough to fill the ever-increasing gap in advertising income being lost to the web. So, the only way forward was for cost-cutting. The former Northcliffe Newspaper group (Press Gazette, 2013) was one of many organisations which looked at cost-cutting

and created its own programme of streaming lining called Aim Higher (Deans, 2006). The cost-cutting hit all aspects of the business, including many journalists, particularly in the production area, such as sub-editors and designers. As part of the cost-cutting measures, some newspaper groups adopted the policy of getting rid of production staff and in some cases centralising subbing and production operations as part of their cost-cutting measures (Press Gazette, 2014; Mayhew, 2017b; Ponsford, 2010). With the emphasis on a web first for news policy, with fewer staff and the newspaper less prominent, it has meant fewer stories being written for the printed product and subbed and fewer local people being interviewed for print. Furthermore, as discussed by (Perch, 2017) one of the cost-reduction methods was to close district offices of newspapers, the outcome of this policy was not only loss of reporting staff, but another pipeline for stories also disappeared for good. The reason for this type of cost-cutting was the loss of advertising revenue. As an example, according to (Perch, 2017) in 2006 British regional newspaper group Johnston Press, which was sold to National World for £10.2m in December 2020 (BBC News, 2020), had taken £80m in revenue from property advertising, but this figure had dropped in 2014, to £22.5m. In the same period, Rightmove, the British property website had gone from zero revenue to more than £167m. A further issue which has arisen is that content required for online is not always transferable to newspapers, the obvious content unavailable includes audio and video, but often the style of writing is unsuited to the traditional newspaper style. Of course, there are exceptions to a reduction in story count, like the *Express & Star*, where the culture of the family business is still high story count and talking to local people. In some cases there were also fewer stories in 1998 editions of the newspapers researched but this was due to the style of the newspaper, where in some newspaper groups there was an emphasis on bolder designs and fewer stories per page and also life-style content over news content. However, the decisions in 1998 for fewer stories were made for style reasons or a move away from news. The recent decisions around news production are based around the move to online first and staff cuts. Generally, the culture of bigger newspaper groups, which is web first, does not facilitate producing large quantities of local news stories for the printed edition or having the time to interview many local people. One question asked was whether it was important to have a high story count? There are varying opinions on this and whether it impacted on keeping sales high. What we know is that with the audience moving online, the rapid increase in the price of local newspapers and giving readers fewer stories, this has not helped to maintain the business. While this paints a gloomy picture for print, it is interesting to note that despite this decline, a recent American study has shown that local newspapers still continue to produce more content than any other media outlet (Napoli and Mahone, 2019). Also, it is worth noting that Reach Plc, the largest commercial, national and regional publisher in the UK still reports that print makes more in revenue than online (Reach Plc, 2019). The figures show that the company revenue was £702m of which print £591m was print revenue and £107m online (Tobbit, 2020). While the print figure is down year-on-year and the online figure up, it highlights that print is still a major contributor to the finances of a media company. This provides a glimmer of hope, but it also has a downside, if

these newspapers continue to decline, who will provide local news and who will be talking to local people to the extent and scale produced by local newspapers before 2018?

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Appendix A

Questions Sent to Media Experts as Part of Research

Question 1: From your experience, do you think there was an emphasis on story count in the last 30 years and, if so, was this detrimental to newspapers i.e., not enough to interest readers?
Question 2: Does the number of local stories in a regional newspapers matter? If so, why?
Question 3: I found there are fewer local stories in some newspapers now than there used to be, what is your view on this?
Question 4: Do you think there are fewer local stories in some local newspaper due to the reduction in staff, the emphasis changing to online first, or that the trend is towards fewer stories or other reasons? Explain fully;
Question 5: From my study, fewer local people are quoted in regional newspaper local stories, does it matter?

Soviet Politics and Journalism under Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost: Why Hopes Failed

By Dmitry Strovsky[*] & Ron Schleifer[±]

The terms perestroika (literally, "transformation") and glasnost (literally, "transparency") refer to the social change that took place in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Then USSR leader, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev, introduced perestroika as a necessary action to improve the nation's economy and its international relations. Glasnost was meant to promote effective discussions regarding the country's existing problems and shortcomings. However, only a few years following their instatement, both processes did not improve the sociopolitical situation. On the contrary, they led to the country's collapse. This article seeks to answer why gracious intentions, meant to actualize the hopes and dreams of the Soviet people, eventually resulted in tremendously difficult times. Special attention is paid to the role of the Soviet media, which became a catalyst for many social problems. The authors raise the issue of the media's level of responsibility during this social transformation, which appeared to be one of the most crucial conditions for its successful implementation.

Keywords: authoritarian culture, social transformation, civic society, perestroika, glasnost, Soviet media

Introduction

Social transformation is a complex phenomenon achieved by shifting traditional features of a country's evolution and adopting new political insights (Harvey, 1989; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Coleman, 2001). It aims to change both the existing system of governmental management and the relationship between all political actors participating in it (Kelle and Koval'zon, 1981). It is a long process dealing with diverse social trends, and therefore such transformation cannot occur overnight; it usually takes several years or even decades. Qualitative changes influencing the interactions between government and society unquestionably affect all spheres of life (Lamazhaa, 2011, p. 262).

Social transformation is sparked by a state of crisis and can succeed only if both the country's political elite and population cooperate. As history demonstrates, if only one side promotes the new system, radical social changes will unlikely develop (Featherstone and Lash, 1995). Both sides may have totally different ideas about why they require transformation, but at a certain stage, through negotiations or intuitively, they must agree on its importance. Otherwise,

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[*]Research Associate, Research Center for Defense and Communication, Ariel University, Israel.
[±]Senior Lecturer, Research Center for Defense and Communication, Ariel University, Israel.

social transformation will inevitably drown in a heap of unresolved problems (Martinelli, 2012; Brown, 2017).

Both successful and failed social transformations have occurred throughout the twentieth century. Among the former is, for instance, the reorganization of the sociopolitical system in Eastern and Central European countries in the 1980s and 1990s, based on the rejection of the authoritarian system of management. By the early years of these transformations, the seemingly solid and unchangeable sociopolitical foundation of autocracy (being a replica of the existing political system in the USSR) gave rise to remarkable changes, including freedom in various spheres of life, as well as a variety of political institutions, parties, and media being independent of the state system. New political institutions created 30 years ago still exist successfully today.

However, such successful social transformation has not taken place in all modern countries. A much more complex situation emerged in the second half of the 1980s in the Soviet Union, during the years of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost. Since their introduction into the public lexicon in the mid-1980s, these two concepts have been inseparable. From the start, perestroika referred to changes in the economic mechanism in the Soviet Union, due to the understanding of Mikhail Gorbachev and his inner circle that the pace of the country's development was significantly behind that of the rest of the world. It was intended to more actively use science and technology, decentralize the management of the national economy, expand the rights of enterprises, introduce self-financing, and boost production.

Glasnost, in turn, was intended to promote these changes, with the development of criticism and self-criticism. Glasnost involved eliminating ambiguities in media coverage, and was also meant to ease censorship and increase access to broader sources of information. Consequently, the Russian media began discussing a new course of social development for the country, which led to the public's eventual acceptance of these ideas (Baturin et al., 1989; Afanasyev, 1991).

The public transformation, which occurred in the country from 1985 to 1991, without overestimation changed the minds of millions of people (Sazanov, 2012). It also quite quickly led to the fall of the Iron Curtain between the USSR and Western countries, and subsequently, already in the 1990s, to market reforms in Russia as being the successor of the USSR.

Perestroika and glasnost had enormous social and political consequences in the USSR and far beyond. In the new conditions, private property was legalized, stock and currency markets were created, and a large number of entrepreneurs appeared from seemingly nowhere. Terms such as *democracy*, *plurality*, and *media freedoms* were being perceived in fundamentally different ways than before, which eventually led to the adoption of the new Constitution of the Russian Federation and a number of other laws that ensured the country's qualitatively new political development (Richter, 2002).

However, the main problem of this fundamental social transformation was the lack of a stable state political governance (Turpin, 1995; Oates, 2001). The 1990s, the first post-perestroika decade in Russia, confirmed the existence of a huge number of unresolved issues that had already been identified during Gorbachev's

tenure. The Soviet leader simply did not know how to solve them in the current conditions, which gradually became a large-scale crisis. One of the most obvious hardships was conspicuous instability of the then economic development and soaring inflation, which caused dire impoverishment of the country's populace (Isakov, 1998). The improvement of life numerously promised by the first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, was not realized either. The country's domestic policy was perceived by most of its people as anti-national and antidemocratic. Two wars initiated by Russia in Chechnya also affected a sharp drop in Yeltsin's popularity rating. Russian society demanded that order be restored to the country and desired a "strong" president who would stop the tension in Chechnya (Le, 2006, pp. 129–154). They also demanded the resolution of pivotal economic issues, by curbing inflation, developing production, and raising wages (Mozes, 1989; Shubin, 2005).

Although the Kremlin's administrative resources and the money used to pay for Vladimir Putin's election campaign obviously helped determine his victory, his relatively young age and his longtime work as a KGB officer were decisive factors in the 2000 elections. Putin symbolized the "order" long awaited by Russian people and received mass support. However, already in the first years of his tenure, Russia demonstrated ignorance to the democratic principles proclaimed during Gorbachev's perestroika. Strong administrative influence on the mass media was clearly observed during Putin's first tenure (2000–2004), when a number of leading media outlets actually became under state control. During Putin's second presidential term (2004–2008), the Kremlin insistently initiated a sale of the remaining media outlets that maintained a position independent from the government.

Today only a very small number of Russian media can express a position independent of the higher powers. This uniformity of views became noticeable as early as a few years ago, when all Russian TV channels, without exception, began lobbying the interests of the current political regime. This was similar to the Soviet period, under which monopolization of collective consciousness under the aegis of the Communist party was evident. Though a direct comparison of the two periods does not seem to be entirely accurate, due to significant appreciable differences between past and current Russian politics, certain parallels do exist.

Why did the social transformation that began in the Soviet Union 35 years ago not create solid guarantees for political plurality and economic development? Moreover, the initial hopes, repeatedly voiced in Russian society, not only inhibited qualitative changes in the country, but became detrimental to the economy.

Answering the above question is the key to understanding the essence of perestroika and glasnost. We will focus our attention not only on the political situation of Gorbachev's time, but also on the historical development of Russian society, providing additional explanations for why perestroika and glasnost, which began quite optimistically, did not bring sufficient far-reaching results. A look into both the more recent and distant past clearly illuminates the trends and prospects of Russian politics and media.

Theoretical Background of the Article

The authors studied numerous scholarly works that have examined the social and political features of perestroika and glasnost as inevitable parts of a lengthy historical process (Matthews, 1989; Mikheyev, 1996; McFaul, 1999; Korotich, 2000; Gaidar, 2020). The focus is the relationship between authorities and society during that time, and the trends that resulted, compared to the USSR's previous political evolution, from 1917 to 1985 (Alexander, 1997; Levada, 2004; Plamper, 2005; Medvedev, 2009; Magun, 2010; Plokhy, 2015). Special attention was paid to the personality of CPSU General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev as the leader of perestroika and glasnost, and his ideas about the essence and the possibilities of the sociopolitical transformation in the country at the time (Pozner, 1990; Cook, 1993; Gorbachev, 1987, 1988; Ligachev, 2009). Works examining the media's role in this process, as well as the content trends that developed in those years were investigated (McNair, 1991; Vachnadze, 1992; Androunas, 1993; Paasilinna, 1995; Rostova, 1997; Belin, 2001; Richter, 2002; Zassoursky, 2004; Oates, 2009).

Gorbachev's Transformation: Origins and Outcomes

The idea of transformation, as an integral definition of the words *perestroika* and *glasnost*, was proclaimed in April 1985 at the plenum of the Communist Party's Central Committee. "We strive for greater transparency […] People should know both the good and the bad…" Mikhail Gorbachev, who had become the CPSU General Secretary a month earlier, noted in his report (Gorbachev, 1988, p. 2). Soviet leaders had regularly uttered similar words long before him, but the proclaimed intentions rarely developed. However, under Gorbachev the gradual social renewal began indeed, which eventually led to the country's rejection of the socialist government (Hewett, 1988; Afanasyev, 1991).

Initially, the purpose of perestroika was to propel the country's social and economic development. The reforms were aimed at initiating competitiveness in the Soviet economy, which obviously lagged behind that of the U.S. and other Western European countries (Gaidar, 2020). Glasnost was meant to promote open discussions about the country's various deficiencies. Gorbachev believed that this openness would provide an impetus to further the nation's progress, which could eventually eliminate existing problems (Magun, 2010; Kotkin, 2018). A special mission to advance glasnost was assigned to the media, who had been under strict state control during Soviet times. They were part and parcel of the political system (Mozes, 1989; Androunas, 1993).

The new political course aroused great enthusiasm in Russian society. Gorbachev traveled the country, meeting with people from all strata of society—in scientific institutions and various industries—to get their feedback. Such direct communication between the leader and his people was considered a new political practice which caused a great enthusiasm from the population. It seemed that the crisis in the country brought about by the introduction of glasnost would be

quelled quickly, and the Soviet economic system would receive a much-need boost. It was apparently necessary to strengthen discipline and to replace negligent leaders; the national system of political and economic management would work eventually.

However, the years of perestroika and glasnost did not bring stable positive changes, and it was clear that Gorbachev and his entourage had misjudged the situation. In the late 1980s, the country increasingly plunged into a large-scale economic crisis gripped by an all-encompassing deficit. Gorbachev's speeches about the need for dynamic development of the country, although true, were increasingly losing their original significance and popularity (Shubin, 2005; Medvedev, 2009).

No National Strategy

There are several reasons why Gorbachev's initial optimistic plans have not been fulfilled. First, the initiators of the social transformation did not have a well thought-out and trustworthy national strategy to implement their leader's intentions. Gorbachev himself was apparently afraid of the rapid implementation of glasnost. Neither he nor his entourage had experienced discussing pivotal issues openly, tête-à-tête, with the people. They could discuss only convenient topics, not those that emerged in times of crisis. Moreover, the very concept of crisis that engulfed the country in the following years was unusual for them. Therefore, while the USSR's political leadership declared the importance of informing the Soviet population about the country's pressing issues, it did not venture to abolish the party's regulations, including formal censorship. These two seemingly mutually exclusive trends accompanied perestroika and glasnost all those years, before the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and Gorbachev's departure from the political scene (Trudoluybov, 2015).

The existence of good intentions, and the unwillingness of the government to implement them, was most clearly confirmed following the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on April 26, 1986. This disaster proved that many of Gorbachev's promises were no more than sloganeering; behind them there was no real readiness to problem solve.

The Chernobyl disaster was the largest nuclear accident in history. In the days that followed, there was total secrecy regarding the explosion. Three days following the disaster, *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist party at the time, published a short news item about what had happened, but the coverage was so vague that it was impossible to understand the tremendous risk that resulted for people and the environment. Almost two weeks later, on May 7, *Pravda* published a skewed report from a press conference held by the representatives of the government commission that investigated the reasons and consequences of the accident. On May 14, Gorbachev finally made a personal statement on the country's only TV station, without fully conveying the seriousness of the situation, omitting the consequences of the destruction and the number of human losses. As the media was unable to acquire the necessary information, as it was strictly

provided, it too remained silent about the catastrophe. They were also forbidden from involving experts in the discussion of the event (Yaroshinskaya, 1992, p. 245).

The same problem concerning the transmission of information became evident during the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Nagorno Karabakh (1987–1988), caused by the sharp rise of the national movement in these Soviet republics. The conflict turned out to be a consequence of disagreements between the right of the Armenian community living in Azerbaijan to self-governance and the refusal of Azerbaijan to permit Armenians to live on their land (Melik-Shakhnazarov, 2011). Information about the conflict circulated constantly in the Russian central media. However, it consistently reached the audience after a great delay, and was incomplete and biased, depending on the objectives of the political moment. The media frequently preferred siding with Azerbaijan and critically assessing Armenia's position, largely due to the Kremlin's different attitudes toward the leadership of both republics (Androunas, 1993, pp. 20–27; Yumatov, 2013).

Despite decreasing control over the media, Soviet authorities continued restricting journalists' access to information regarding social conflicts. Although glasnost expanded the opportunities for people to know, it did not ensure the implementation of their right to receive timely and reliable information, due to the country's long history of authoritarian rule (Strovsky, 2011, p. 235).

Resistance from the Party

Another reason why perestroika and glasnost did not ensure sustainable development was because Mikhail Gorbachev and his close entourage, in their efforts to implement sociopolitical and economic changes, were unable to overcome the resistance of the party apparatus. During the implementation of glasnost, many officials felt a threat to their personal security. Even Gorbachev himself, time after time, seriously worried that the civil activity of the population would go beyond "reasonable" limits, and therefore did not always act purposefully to resolve political and social problems. This was noticeable, for example, during social unrests in Kazakhstan (1986), Azerbaijan (1988), Georgia (1989), and in a number of provincial regions. The Soviet leader, fearing negative consequences of what was happening, avoided making operational decisions. Instead of being resolute and thereby outpacing the progress of conflicts, Gorbachev plunged into endless and exhausting discussions, indicating that he was indecisive and had a very poor understanding of many pressing situations. It was as if he were putting many issues into a large box, in the hope that they would somehow resolve themselves. The results, however, tended to be exactly the opposite of what he had expected.

Gorbachev feared losing the party's support during the Lithuanian crisis in January 1991, after Lithuania declared independence from the USSR in March 1990. While Soviet authorities had eagerly sought to delay this process, it was inevitable. As a result, additional military units were sent to Lithuania. Every month, the situation became more and more severe (Vedomosti of the Supreme

Council and Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 1990). On January 13, 1991, the Soviet military carried out the assault against the TV tower in Vilnius, which led to great tragic consequences: 13 people were killed and at least 140 were wounded (BBC, 1991). However, since then, the process of Lithuania gaining independence progressed faster than before. After returning from one of his foreign trips, Gorbachev publicly stated that he was unaware of what was happening, which was certainly far from the truth (Gelaev, 2015). More likely, he eagerly wished to be distant from these social "eruptions," while assuming that, at that time, he would be at risk of losing the confidence of the party.

Situations such as the Lithuania crisis have determined an acute conflict of interests, both within the ruling Communist party, and between officials and society. Whereas under the flux of broadcast information, society openly demanded changes, the highest powers in the country were wary of them and hindered the development of democracy. Yet this stimulated in Lithuania a new round of rejection of the Soviet government and the desire to leave the USSR. For example, following the Lithuania crisis, Gorbachev demanded the suspension of the Media Law (1990) that he had personally approved some time before. He believed that this law remarkably provoked the situation (Rostova, 1997). The lack of eagerness to resolve conflicts such as the Lithuania crisis triggered a collapse that became more apparent only a few months later.

The years of perestroika and glasnost were marked by pronounced social dilemmas. The sudden flood of information uprooted people's previous ideas about everything around them. A significant reason for the "Brownian motion" in the country was the unwillingness of the Soviet republics that were part of the USSR to see Moscow as the main political center as it had been previously. They were increasingly in favor of their own decision-making on major issues, especially multinational, given the majority of non-Russians living in those parts of the country. The Soviet republics did not want the previous system of cadre nominations initiated by Moscow. Consequently, the Kremlin was gradually losing control, and many political and economic initiatives seemingly adopted there for the Soviet republics remained unfulfilled. The country was becoming an endless field for numerous and largely useless discussions, whereas the real development of the USSR looked very uncertain and worrisome with every passing year.

Authoritarian vs Civic Culture

An even greater problem hindered the transformation into a civic culture in the USSR: the country's extremely strong authoritarian political roots. An authoritarian political culture is characterized by the state's strict control over the country, subordinating all manifestations of social and individual life. The leadership of the main political party consciously undermines any legal opposition. Additionally, the dominance of ideology, centralized subordination of the economy, and the state's monopoly on the media become a priority (Hopkins, 1970; Remington, 1981; Siebert et al. 1984). In turn, a civic political culture emphasizes freedom of spiritual and political relations, no matter how idealistic. It

promotes consensus (albeit conditional at times) between state and social interests. However, as it maintains the dominant role of the state in resolving major issues, such a culture is likely to generate serious disagreements in society (Almond and Verba, 1963).

Long before the establishment of Soviet power in 1917, Russia professed to the authoritarian ideology. The country was traditionally an absolute monarchy that undermined all other branches of political management, including Parliament, which emerged in Russia only in 1906, much later than in other European countries. "All Muscovites or Russians are content with a more servile state than a free one and are headed by an outstanding guardian whom they consider as their own ruler," wrote Italian historiographer Alexander Guagnini as early as in the 16th century (Kantor, 1998, p. 15). The centuries-old presence of such an authority determined strict centralization of political and economic power. This formed a pronounced way to chiefdom, under which monarchy was crowned as "the anointed of God." In Soviet times, this resulted in the formation of a cult of personality around the leaders of the country.

The lack of rights and freedoms in Russian society led to the suppression of individual opinions. This was significantly different from the dominant attitude in European countries, where the ideas of the emancipation of an individual and plurality in the political and economic spheres was actively propagated and achieved (Strovsky, 2001, pp. 47–48). In Russia, unlike "enlightened Europe," it was not the state that naturally grew out of civil society; rather, society made weak attempts to establish itself under the strict patronage of the state. Active members of the social groups that tended to change the subordination between the state and individuals in Russia had the only means to do so, through cooperation with the state, which meant giving up their own political desires (Pipes, 1974).

All this formed a certain cultural genotype in Russia, affecting the relationship between the citizens and the government. Everything was traditionally controlled not only through law, but also through the efforts of those who were in power. This system in turn created a constantly propagated "mobilization strategy" (Panarin, 1997, pp. 46–49) that stimulated the societal belief that strong efforts can achieve optimal results (Lossky, 1991). It fixed in the collective consciousness the desire for the rapid destruction of previous beliefs, through mass riots and revolutions, and eventually ensured the Bolsheviks' rise to power in 1917.

However, this renewal of the political system did not lead to a changed relationship between the government and society. The methods of this interaction resembled the traditional ones, built on the idea of an "absolutist state" (Leontovich, 1995, pp. 1–4). Greater centralization of powers in the Soviet state led to even more limited freedom of speech and the media, compared to prerevolutionary times (Zimon, 1998, p. 12). As a result, all social life was subjected to a strong dictate that led to stricter totalitarian relations (Arendt, 1951; Đilas, 1957).

The key element of these relations was the existence of a party political system, dominated by the concentration of power and the lack of political competition. All threads of state administration were controlled by the politburo, headed by the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, which built its activities on party ideology. Through this ideology, a prioritization of values was

inserted into collective consciousness (such as serving authority, considering the state before thinking about oneself, and maintaining loyalty to Communist ideas in all sectors of society). The Soviet management system was considered much more effective compared to such systems in capitalist countries. Various forms of propaganda, including the party press, were used to enlighten the population with their ideas (Buzek, 1964; Choldin, 1985).

Social life in Russia prior to 1917, and later, in the Soviet years, was still more diverse than one might assume from the above description. Science, art, book publishing, etc., were developing continuously. Nonetheless, unified archetypes of collective consciousness and behavior were being formed, including the portrayal of the state as "productive space" for the development of society and individuals, a sacred attitude to powers, and the significance of the printed word, which professed the "only correct" interpretation of facts (Vilkov and Zakharova, 2010, pp. 105–129). This created a simplified perception of the world and ensured that any nonstandard initiatives offered in various areas of life progressed with great difficulty. It seemed that the country could not get out of its centuries-old bureaucratic state, and for this reason the technical modernization undertaken by the Soviet leadership in the twentieth century, did not bring changes to the familiar status quo between the government and society (Vishnevsky, 1996, pp. 55–57).

The social transformation that developed under Gorbachev led to dramatic changes. Gorbachev did not seek to destroy the previous values of political subordination; he only intended to preserve the political system in the form that existed throughout the Soviet years. He only wanted to add "a little bit of democracy," leaving the entire political basis unchanged. However, under the rapidly developed glasnost, the country's most pressing political, legal, national, and other issues began coming to the fore. This created serious problems, both within ruling bodies and between the government and society. Glasnost also tackled media content, while previously they were restricted from making true assessments of politics (McFaul, 1999).

Due to the USSR's long-lasting hierarchical system of management, the relationship between the government and society at a new stage of national history turned out to be extremely volatile (Omelichkin, 2015). The rejection of the prior system of subordination began to crumble in 1988; by 1989, it had spun out of control. It was similar to a clock's pendulum that, over many centuries, had been swinging in one direction. However, under the new reality, it abruptly swung in the opposite direction, sweeping away everything on its path.

In the new political environment, the country was unable to form a legislative mechanism for resolving conflicts. Even the rapid adoption of a number of laws that met the current requirements (Law on Cooperatives in 1988, Media Law in 1990, and others, as well as the abolition of article 6 of the Constitution regarding the leadership of the Communist party and the establishment of a multiparty system) did not create a consensus between the government and society. This became a true hindrance toward social transformation in the Soviet Union.

Media Content

The media contributed greatly to Russia's social transformation. Having existed under strict subordination to the authorities since 1917, the media suddenly had a new role. New topics stimulated media popularity among local residents, and throughout the world, as well as an increase of publications by 15 to 16 million copies annually. In turn, from 1985 to 1988, the total circulation of all Soviet print media increased by 62.4 million copies (Yesin and Kuznetsov, 2002, pp. 171–172). Simultaneously, the new content contained contradictions and misunderstanding, due to the articles' updated format, which ultimately elicited a contradictory attitude toward the media both from the authorities and society.

Various types of media content were then proposed:

- Soviet history and active debates about the country's future
- Sociopolitical conflicts
- Personal opinions
- Letters and responses to social issues from ordinary people

We will focus briefly on the above media trends.

Soviet History and Active Debates about the Country's Future

The entire pre-Soviet period, which had been positively perceived in the past, fell into the orbit of mass attention. Through media, especially politically oriented journals, the Russian audience became acquainted with various periods of Soviet history, immediately causing fulminant feedback. Stalin and his entourage were perhaps most actively criticized, compared to later leaders of the country: Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and others. Negative assessments even touched Lenin and his staff.

Moscow magazine *Ogonyok* (Twinkle), edited by Vitaly Korotich, debunked long-term historical myths most prominently. It published historical memoirs about former leaders of the Soviet state, articles on red terror and persecution of the intelligentsia, etc. *Ogonyok* provided scholars, cultured people, and even immigrants a chance to discuss these topics. The magazine's editorial board sought to present the evolution of the national culture as a whole, not divided in "ours" and "not ours." At that time, such a stance was new. The media wished to know the past in detail, no matter how incongruous it was.

If the initial publications did not affect the foundations of the Soviet political system, later media content became more uncompromising, criticizing the political powers increasingly as time progressed (McNair, 1991). Criticism of the current party leadership became more pronounced. For the first time in many years, the media attempted to depict the Communist party much more honestly and openly than before, and such openness stimulated public interest in the media. They thereby influenced the ongoing political reforms and stimulated public consciousness in Soviet society (Ovsepyan, 2009, p. 12). This approach provoked

a sharp reaction from the audience, which began criticizing corruption in government bodies and the privileges of officials.

Sociopolitical Conflicts

The media criticism that grew in Russian society intensified sociopolitical conflicts. These conflicts were often unconnected with media content, however; the very atmosphere in the country facilitated a more open expression of negativism toward the authorities, which was quite exceptional before perestroika. Without overestimation, perestroika affected the whole country. In the summer of 1989, Russia's coal districts were engulfed by a mass strike of miners who were refused their salaries. The media actively covered these events, criticizing officials for slow work. In contrast to the power structures that tried convincing the population that the problems were temporary, many news outlets raised the issue of increasing conflict, foreseeing even greater social upheavals in the future.

Personal Opinions

The word *I*, rarely used in the media previously, became ubiquitous during this period. Mandatory editorials and information about "achievements in work" led to opinionated content reports, essays, and comments (with headings such as "There is an opinion!", "I ask for the word," etc.). Journalists increasingly freed themselves from ideological dependence on the government, bringing their own assessments to the fore. At the same time, many journalists stated the need to develop democracy, and freedom of speech and of the press. In raising these issues, some reporters became more popular than film actors. Soon journalists of the national media were being perceived in collective consciousness as pseudo-politicians. This eventually led to their association with the power elite of the country in the early 1990s.

Letters and Responses to Social Issues from Ordinary People

Many editorial offices began perceiving their interaction with their audience as a vital part of their daily work. Letters circulated in the media criticized the country's various shortcomings and discussed issues that were very painful for the Russian people to confront: the dominance of bureaucracy, environmental problems, corruption, etc. The national and local press devoted entire pages to these letters, and people's opinions were also actively voiced on the air. These opinions often assessed everyday reality from different positions, which was new for the time. The "voice of the people" brought a strikingly pronounced diversity to the media content, which only increased interest in the issues being discussed.

Despite external appeal, the abovementioned content trends generated a controversial reaction, both from the authorities and among various strata of Soviet society. A great number of people were not ready for such rapid changes in the information agenda.

While expanding the existing framework of freedom of information, Soviet journalists did not always take into account the social psychology of the mass audience, its ability to accept the novelty of information influence overnight. The media's harsh, unapologetic assessment of the country's past and present was not morally accepted by many people, which contributed to a rapid split in society. In addition, during those years the media began raising topics that did not fit into traditional values: celebrity lifestyles, crime, etc. However, this enticing content was unreliable, and therefore the media were unable to build stable trust among its mass audience. Trust is formed not only due to an article's cleverness and entertainment value; journalists must feel a responsibility to their audience. The Soviet media were not prepared for this. When defending the priorities of glasnost, they perceived that their main task was to free themselves from the legacy of Russia's past. For this purpose, they used different forms of influence, including sensational information. Constant fluctuations in the media's portrayal of the situation made their position totally unstable and untrustworthy.

Discord

The main problem with Gorbachev's transformation was not the renewed media information, but the social situation itself. Despite significant sociopolitical changes, the CPSU still had a monopoly on media resources, and its decisions were formally considered as "the only correct ones." For this reason, all doubts about the prospects of socialism or various ways of national development were fiercely dismissed by the political powers themselves. During those years, the idea of socialism "with a human face" suddenly became popular, but it was impossible to understand the meaning of "human face" in relation to the existing political system. While the party allowed the media to present a critical view of the country's past, the party was extremely jealous of the country's present. Gorbachev's utterance at the very beginning of perestroika, that "we have no zones closed to criticism," remained a mere slogan.

As the transformation progressed, the country's economic situation became increasingly precarious. Food was becoming increasingly scarce (Sogrin, 2001). Regions even began switching to a distribution (coupon) system that restricted the population from purchasing certain essential goods: meat, sausage, sugar, butter, etc. All this created uncertainty in the minds of people who could no longer be reassured by Gorbachev's speeches that perestroika and glasnost were "irreversible." Unlike the population of many Western countries, which enthusiastically welcomed Gorbachev during his foreign visits, the Soviet people perceived him more and more reservedly, if not negatively, seeing him as personally responsible for all of the country's problems (FOM, 2016).

Some media were fiercely critical of the ongoing transformation. In an article in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* (March 1988), by Nina Andreeva, an associate professor at the Leningrad Technological Institute, the writer opposed critics of the Communist system. She argued that Soviet history was marked by many achievements, and

that mass repressions in the 1930s and 1940s were caused by objective necessity. She fiercely protected Stalin's methods of leadership (Andreeva, 1988).

Individual representatives of the country's leadership did not hide their satisfaction with Andreeva's article. Yegor Ligachev, a member of the CPSU politburo, said the article expressed exactly what he was interested in during those years: the rejection of the reckless undermining of the past. "At that time many noted: Andreeva's article was her reaction to the muddy flow of anti-historical and anti-Soviet materials in our press" (Ligachev, 2009, p. 147). Only a month later, on April 5, 1988, *Pravda* published an editorial: "Principles of Perestroika: Revolutionary Thinking and Actions," which noted that Andreeva's ideas were completely opposite to those expressed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party headed by Gorbachev.

The conflicting attitude to perestroika was actively growing during those years. Mikhail Gorbachev and his inner circle could no longer stop such attitudes from spreading. Obviously, when initiating the transformation, Gorbachev could not consciously imagine where it would lead. It seemed to him that it was only necessary to "open the door a little" through a "healthy discussion" of problems, and the management system would straighten up and work. Yet the number of political, economic, legal, national, and other problems that were first brought to light was so great that they created a destructive storm that swept away everything in its path.

Along with it, journalists, who had been brought up with the authoritarian ideology, often proved to be completely inflexible in establishing the most important issues. "During the six years of perestroika," Vachnadze (1992, p. 15) fairly pointed out, "the Soviet government and its press tainted themselves with campaigns of silence and direct disinformation. The press still had a long way to go, from glasnost to freedom of information." Today, almost thirty years after these words were articulated, they are still relevant.

In the absence of journalists' ability to work in the new conditions, which required increased responsibility for the word, many articles were so destructive that they seriously hindered the building of constructive relations between actors in sociopolitical conflicts. This was confirmed by Gorbachev's own inability to see the real problems of the transformation.

Consequently, a few of the country's leaders that did not agree with the course of transformation created the State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP). In August 1991, the committee planned to remove Gorbachev from power and to take responsibility for further reforms. At the same time, its statements immediately following seizing power confirmed that the GKChP sought to stop many laws passed in previous years and to introduce strict censorship (Plokhy, 2015). Although the GKChP did not receive any public support, its emergence showed that perestroika and glasnost had finally reached an impasse. The social transformation in the second half of the 1980s led to the collapse of the USSR and the beginning of a new page in the country's history.

Conclusion

In the late 1980s, the political situation in Russia was determined by the course of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost. The sociopolitical processes that took place in the country during those years awakened public consciousness and stimulated the attention of the media, making them full participants amid the changes.

Meanwhile, the changes initiated by Gorbachev were difficult for millions of Soviet people to understand and accept. The proposed transformation formed a new perception of reality, unusual and nontraditional, which created a gradual splitting of society and the formation of small groups with new political interests. The conflict between them was so remarkable that it seemed impossible to overcome it, even in the future. As a result, the issues and difficulties of the social transformation in the USSR were not less noticeable than its achievements. This is the answer to the question raised at the very beginning, why the changes that began in the Soviet Union a few decades ago did not create guarantees for the development of plurality and a steady movement toward market reforms.

Mikhail Gorbachev, who successfully launched perestroika and glasnost, was unable to pass the test of democratic change. At the end of his reign, he became more inclined to the old, conservative methods of leadership, which affected his personal authority: He was losing popularity with every passing month. The leader of the country was tossed between various conflicting actors (new political parties that began appearing, the left and right in the Supreme Council of the USSR, members of the government), ultimately pulling the brake on perestroika and glasnost.

Why did Gorbachev and his entourage fail to implement the ideas that held so much promise? There are a few reasons. First, Gorbachev himself could not overcome the resistance of the Communist party. In fulfilling the ideals of perestroika and glasnost, many officials felt a threat to their personal safety and, one way or another, did not favor the proclaimed reforms. Second, Gorbachev, as a party representative, was concerned that the civil activity of the population does not go beyond the "reasonable," and he therefore did not always act decisively and purposefully. He never once questioned the need for a Communist party, which inevitably held back all political changes that went beyond the ruling ideology. Third, the desire for compromise and "balanced" decisions failed as the economic situation in the USSR worsened, and sociopolitical, interethnic, and other conflicts ensued. Gorbachev often did not have the patience to deal with these issues consistently, and preferred using repressive measures, often relying on the military. This response could not contribute to the formation of public confidence in the country's leader and the ideas that he professed.

Due to numerous clashes in the society—including historical, moral, and multinational issues—many political and economic initiatives remained unfulfilled during the years of perestroika and glasnost. The lack of a well-thought-out national development strategy also impacted the situation. Soviet society did not understand the direction the country was moving in, what its priorities were. The authorities preferred keeping silent, perhaps waiting for instructions from the

Kremlin—which portrayed vagueness and uncertainty—and were too intimidated to act independently.

The late 1980s were fertile for journalistic creativity. The weakening of political censorship provided a powerful surge in the country's media content. It became more consumed by the mass audience due to promoting more vivid information and a constant dialogue with the readership, which was attractive and made journalists very influential in society. This, however, did not save the country's entire sociopolitical process. The media, as well as society itself, were largely held hostage by the political apparatus, which did not seek to be more open in its decisions. Glasnost meant undermining the government's influence on society, and therefore Soviet officials became the main obstacle to any changes in various spheres of life. While they spoke about the need to change public consciousness, they actually feared these changes because they threatened their personal safety. Only the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought a real political and economic transformation.

Analyzing perestroika and glasnost can contribute to current and future research of the political science and media in modern Russia, given that contemporary political life there is so similar to its past. The late 1980s comprised the familiar trends of Russian history, as well as contradictions in the relationship between the government, society, and the media. A thorough assessment of that time puts into perspective the country's challenges over the past two decades, under President Vladimir Putin. It also answers the question of why the initial intentions for the development of democracy and pluralism, as proclaimed by the Kremlin, have not evolved successfully: Since the traditional authoritarian experience still remains a stable phenomenon in Russian social life, any profound political changes are illusory and unlikely to be implemented in practice.

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New Media in Film Distribution in Bangladesh: Bane or Boon?

By Saiyeed Shahjada Al Kareem[*]

The research explores the little-understood phenomena of new media based film distribution system in Bangladesh, finds the consequences of new media in film distribution, and makes a recommendation for developing an effective film distribution system. This research employs a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews of people involved in traditional and online film distribution systems are taken to collect data. The study finds that new media based film distribution is an emerging sector in Bangladesh, and it will strengthen the overall distribution system by reducing the distribution costs and increasing revenue.

Keywords: new media, internet, online, film distribution, video on demand

Introduction

This research explores the utilization of new media in film distribution in Bangladesh, finds the consequences of new media-based film distribution and searches for ways to establish an effective film distribution system based on new media.

The process by which "a film reaches the marketplace and is made available to its target audience" is called film distribution, which is done by selling a film to different gateways like theatrical distributors, broadcast networks, DVD companies, and new-media outlets (Parks, 2007, p. 1). In this process, fixing release dates and launching advertising campaigns are also done by the distributors (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 36).

The film distribution system of Bangladesh is going through a crisis at the present time. The digital era has caused the industry to experience varying problems. The emergence of new media has raised a question that invites us to think about reorganizing the distribution system. According to Neese (2016), social media, blogs, video games, and online news outlets are typically referred to as "new media" and these channels of communication have far-reaching implications for society, business, and politics. Different terms like digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked, and simulated, define new media (Lister et al., 2009, p. 13). The popular culture of new media has been started with the video games (Lister et al., 2009, p. 237) whereas the term "new media" refers to the "Internet" and also a virtual environment, digital TV or blog (Lister et al., 2009, p. 12). Again, "Internet" is defined as the collection of networks that links computers and servers together (Lister et al., 2009, p. 164).

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[*]Lecturer, Department of Television, Film and Photography, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

In recent times, the conventional movie distribution system has been modified throughout the entire globe after the upward push of new media, which are the sort of media that might be native to computer systems, computational and rely on computers and the internet for distribution, such as: YouTube, Netflix, Amazon and so forth. The film distribution system of Bangladesh is also going through changes as new media is being utilized in it, but these changes are mostly an unexplored area as academics have still not looked into them through a critical lens. As Cunningham et al. (2010) argue that Online Distribution benefits idependent and the rest-of-the-world cinema (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 128), where online refers to the new media, it is essential to learn about the present state of online film distribution in Bangladesh to analyze the impacts of it on the whole distribution system.

Currently, there are three companies: Bongo, Bioscope, and Iflix that are distributing feature films along with other video content in Bangladesh. Bongo was the first VOD (Video On Demand) platform of the country that started streaming in 2012 (M. Rahman, personal communication, May 8, 2018). Bioscope was launched in 2016 as a value-added service of Grameenphone, a leading mobile service operator in Bangladesh. Moreover, Grameenphone itself is supported by Telenor, a Norwegian multinational telecommunications company (M. Rahman, personal communication, May 8, 2018). Iflix is a multinational VOD streaming site that started its journey in Bangladesh in 2017. It is supported by the leading telecommunications group Axiata, a conglomerate originating in Malaysia and by Robi Axiata Limited in Bangladesh (S.R. Islam, personal communication, May 8, 2018). Two companies named Khona Talkies and Indi Minds distribute Bangladeshi short and feature films to different international film festivals. Khona Talkies started distribution in 2011 (A. Rakhine, personal communication, May 12, 2018) and Indi Minds in 2016 (S. K Paul, personal communication, March 1, 2018).

This study investigates the little-understood phenomena, that is, the use of new media for distributing films and strives to find out the impacts of new media in the film distribution system with a view to finding ways to develop an effective film distribution system in Bangladesh.

Significance of the Study

In Bangladesh, the entire film industry is facing different kinds of issues. Film distribution is also facing problems as the system is not able to generate enough revenue in return of the money invested by producers. The monopoly of booking agents has made distributors fall into great problems while distributing films (Khan, 2017, p. 79). However, the proper distribution system can be a remedy to this problem, and the utilization of new media in film distribution can be the trump card to turn the least active distribution system into an effective one. For this reason, the present situation of new media based film distribution in Bangladesh needs to be explored to understand the impacts of new media on the overall film distribution process. It will also provide suggestions to establish an effective distribution system utilizing new media.

Literature Review

This section aims to assess the essential scholarly works on new media based film distribution. The key arguments, methodologies, and limitations of these studies are discussed to comprehend the current trends in this field of study and find out the gaps. Since no work is found on new media based film distribution in Bangladesh, research work in related fields are examined here.

Traditional Film Distribution

In the book "*Film Art: An Introduction",* Bordwell and Thompson (2008) discuss the film distribution process, explain that it is done mainly by the distribution companies, which they say, form the core of the economic power in the commercial film industry. Traditional film distribution refers to the theatrical release of the films, as in, distribution companies make films available to different exhibiting theatres for the audience. For this reason, a large amount of money goes into distributing films. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) estimate that, for Hollywood films, the average cost of production is $60 million and for distribution, it is $35 million (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 36). They also describe the two major strategies of theatrical distribution. In platforming strategy, the film is first released in few big cities and then gradually around the rest of the country according to the performance of the film. In wide release strategy, a film is released in many cities and towns and also overseas (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 36). A theatre is provided a little percentage of the gross money as the authors assert that, in the first week, a theatre gets only 10% from the gross amount of money; in the United States, the distributor, takes 35% of the rentals as distribution fee and rest are for the filmmaker (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 34–35).

Online Film Distribution

Nowadays, with the advancement of the internet, cyberspace has become a new platform for film distribution, which Bordwell and Thompson (2008) state to be the new frontier of video distribution, and regard this as online film distribution (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 38). It has emerged since that it is possible to release any length of film online, and a huge profit can be gained with the advantage of blocking the films from being pirated (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 38).

Cunningham et al. (2010) have conducted a study on the film industry of Australia, where they have done an online search and examined the content and business models of websites that deliver movies on demand through the internet. They have consulted leading trade magazines, online business directories, expert service providers, and used business databases, such as Factiva and Proquest, to identify relevant articles on the industry and on OLD (On Line Distribution) service providers. In their research, they discuss how OLD first came into the sector and made changes in the film industry and how it works as a disruptive technology in the film industry.

According to Cunningham et al. (2010), online distribution (OLD) first emerged in 1997 in North America with pioneers like I-Film, Atom Films, Intertainer, SightSound, Pop.com, CinemaNow etc., but these companies had been absorbed by larger companies as they failed to establish sustainable business models (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 121). Paramount, Universal, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, Walt Disney, and Sony – the six major Hollywood studios had invested in Movielink and Movie beam in 2001 which were expected, they state, to be the leaders of a second wave but both websites were sold in 2006 (Cunningham et al., p. 121). Apple iTunes led a third wave by building a leading movie download business with Hulu, at the same time as Netflix, Blockbuster Amazon, and some others (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 121). Amazon came with its own VOD service Unbox, and Netflix made available its streaming service 'Watch Instantly' to its DVD subscribers in the United States in 2006 (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 123). Via its Australian online store, Apple iTunes launched its movies-on-demand service in 2008 (as cited in Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 124).

Advertiser supported site Hulu started live streaming in March 2008 and within a year, became five times bigger than how it was when it started out. However, Hulu, which had 2.4 percent share of the total OLD market, was dominated by YouTube, which had a 41 percent share (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 122). However, the majority of the YouTube video content did not attract advertisers as most of the videos on the site were user-generated, and this caused YouTube to face a 470 million dollar loss in 2009 (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 122). In 2009, Hulu's advertiser-supported free viewing business model, may have seemed unsustainable as ad revenue of online video was estimated to be 60 percent lower than that of the same program shown on network television. This led Hulu towards a subscription-plus-advertising revenue structure (Cunningham et al., 2010, pp. 122–123). Different experiments like Warner Bros. studio's attempt in digitally renting movies on Facebook in 2011, made Marble, CEO of an online marketplace, to estimate in 2012 that the online distribution had become very vital for major Hollywood Studios (Kozlowski, 2012)

Film Distribution in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, most of the film distributors are also the producers at the same time, and there is only one association for them named "Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association". There are booking agents who work as middlemen between the distributors and exhibitors, and they control the whole system since they are the authority to decide which film will be exhibited where. Hossain (2017) states this as a "weird situation" and this situation predominates the film industry.

Kareem (2017), in his research, has explored the film distribution process and its problems in Bangladesh, where he interviews eight traditional film distributors and used inductive thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data. He stated that in most cases, the same person acts as the producer and distributor of a film, but in the case of different people taking on these two roles, a distributor is to be paid 15% of the net profit. He adds that distributors distribute the films among the

exhibiting halls with the help of booking agents who are the mediators between distributors and exhibitors. Booking agents book films for the exhibiting halls and also take a 10% commission of net income from the distributors. Exhibiting halls allocate payment in three ways, fixed rental, minimum guarantee, and percentage or share money. The method "percentage" or "share money", in which the distributor collects a fixed percentage of net income, is the worst one, as Khan (2017) shows that through this method, a producer gets only 20% of a ticket's price (Khan, 2017, p. 77).

Since the exhibitors do not have the advanced technological support to exhibit digital films, some organizations are taking advantage by providing poor quality projection support and controlling the exhibiting halls (Khan, 2017, p. 77). In his research, Ahsan (2016) has taken face to face interviews of film industry professionals of Bangladesh and stated that an organization named Jaaz Multimedia has evolved as an intermediary force in the film industry of the country, and is charging money from the digital film producers to let them use the digital film projectors in the exhibiting halls (Ahsan, 2016, p. 244). This is a threat to the film industry as Parvez (2013) states that this tendency to control the film exhibition system can make cinema lose its independence, which is what happened in Canada and Australia when six big American companies had taken control over the entire film distribution system in the 1970s and 1980s (Parvez 2013, p. 6).

Impacts of New Media on Film Distribution

In their research, Kehoe and Mateer (2015) have done a situational case study on the film industry of the United Kingdom and examined two movements impacting the industry where new media have made changes in consumption habits, leading to the emergence of new business models. The Value Chain concept was coined by Porter in 1985, where "value chain" is a framework for identifying the set of interconnected value-creating activities performed by a company in developing, manufacturing, delivering, and supporting its product and the points of connection with the activities of suppliers, channels, and customers. Digital technology affects the motion picture value chain by bringing a new type of consumers named "active audiences" into play. Kehoe and Mateer (2015) define "active audiences" as a group of consumers who have knowledge of technology, and consume media products through the internet. Kevin Zhu led a reasearch with its theoretical foundation based on the economics of digital goods and transformation of industry structure. With Figure 1, Zhu (2001) has shown how internet-based distribution can affect the value chain as the internet tends to disintermediate the traditional distribution agencies (p. 275). He also argues that internet-based film distribution will reduce the distribution cost, and the importance of traditional distributors will decrease (Zhu, 2001, p. 275).

Figure 1. The Motion Picture Value Chain
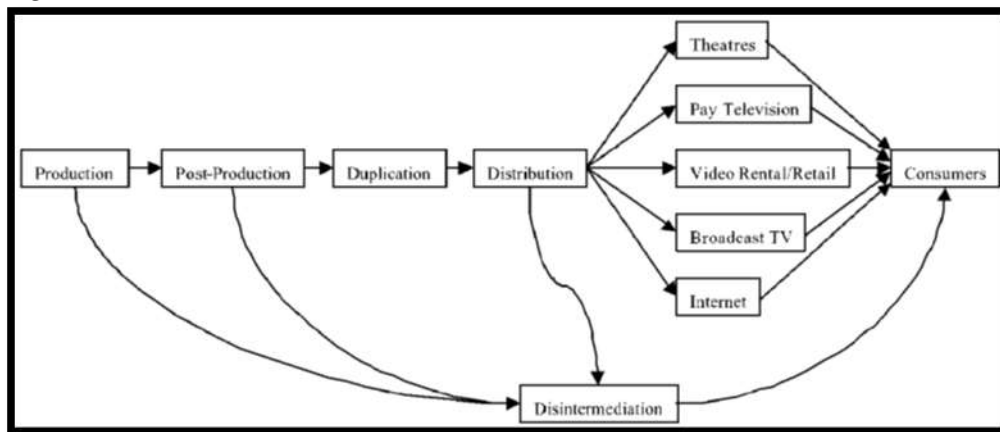
Kehoe and Mateer (2015) also discuss how changes in business models occur while distributing films through new media. They explain that multiple approaches have emerged, such as "ultra VOD" and "day-and-date" releases. "Ultra VOD" refers to releasing a cinema online through transactional video on demand (TVOD) a week before scheduled theatrical release to create a sense of exclusivity and "day-and-date" means a concurrent release on the same day on multiple distribution platforms like cinema theatres, online VODs (Netflix, others), DVDs, etc. (Kehoe & Mateer, p. 102). There is an advertiser supported model that enables visitors to watch movies and TV programs for free, whereas this sales model can offer charges, which are subscription sites that take rental for the determined time period (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 126). Again, there is an IT-innovation model where platforms like Hulu are content-driven, and services like iTunes are device-driven. This means a consumer needs to own an iPod, Apple TV, iPad or a supported device which Cunningham et al. (2010) states as a significant disruption to standard business models because it sells premium or near-premium content intending to make a profit from hardware device sales and to buy market share (Cunningham et al. 2010, pp. 126–127).

Ahmed (2010), in his research, employed case studies on three Bollywood movies, which include *Om Shanti Om* (2007), *Ghajini* (2008), and *Dev. D* (2009), to understand how new media tools were used in their marketing strategy. He found that, opposing traditional media, the internet is dominating the viewers's decision-making process about which film to watch. Nime (2012), in his Ph.D. thesis, employed a qualitative method, and in an exploratory way, tried to understand the impact of digital technologies upon the culture and economy of documentary distribution. He argues that online distribution not only makes the films available to the audience but also attaches the audience in the distribution process. He states that online distribution platforms like Netflix, YouTube etc. attach consumers by including systems of rating, commenting, sharing, tagging etc., which help them get more audience.

Researchers have discussed new media based film distribution around the world. However, from a Bangladeshi perspective, its role on Bangladeshi film

distribution has been left mostly unexplored by the researchers. Ahsan (2016) has identified the rise of an intermediary force as a problem, which is trying to control the film distribution system, but his research did not provide any suggestion to resolve the problem. Kareem (2017) has outlined the traditional distribution system in Bangladesh and stated that a server-based digital distribution system is yet to be developed in Bangladesh. However, there is no insight in his research about the utilization of new media in the distribution system active at present.

In different researches, Kehoe and Mateer (2015), Zhu (2001), Fair (2006), Ahmed (2010), and Nime (2012) tried to understand the impacts of new media based film distribution in the worldwide perspective. However, it does not seem enough to paint a full picture, and no research has yet been done to understand the effects of new media based film distribution in Bangladesh.

Research Questions

The literature review suggests that the following research questions should be explored in the present research.

RQ-1: How have the new media been utilized in film distribution in Bangladesh?

RQ-2: How will the new media affect the film distribution in Bangladesh?

RQ-3: How can an effective film distribution system be created in Bangladesh based on the new media?

Theoretical Framework

The research takes the critical political economy of communication as the theoretical base to identify the dominant economic and political factors in the utilization of new media and its effect on film distribution in Bangladesh. Mosco (2009) has defined critical political economy as "the study of social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources" (Mosco, 2009, p. 24). Thomas Guback, in his essay "*Are We Looking at the Right Things in Film",* first drew attention on the study of cinema from a political-economic approach in 1978. He argued that film studies did not pay attention to the analysis of cinema as an economic institution and his use of institutional approach to film seemed more like a political-economic approach to the study of communication (Wasko, 2004, p. 219).

The relationships between media power and state power are analyzed in the discussion of the critical political economy by identifying the owners and controllers of media and communication resources (Wasko, 2014, p. 260). In the case of film distribution, the owners and controllers of new distribution outlets, relations between the state and the distributors are examined by the critical political economy. Furthermore, media power is assessed by the discussion of class issues (Wasko, 2014, p. 263). Critical political economists ask if online film

distribution is open for all or bound to a separate class. On the other hand, the critical political economy of new media should be concerned with the understanding of power structure, its evolution, and renewal (Mansell, 2004, p. 6), where understanding the domination of small capital by big capital and capturing the market by big conglomerates are discussed. The involvement of the state in the film industry, reproduction of power structure, uneven power distribution, and wealth, which are represented by the industry, are also matters of interest in the critical political economic approach (Wasko, 2004, p. 228).

Drawing on the work of Murdock and Golding (2005), Mosco (2009) discussed four cornerstones of the critical political economy: social change and history, social totality, moral philosophy, and praxis. Social change and history refer to examining dynamic forces within capitalism to understand the change in social relationships over time (Mosco, 2009, p. 3). Guback (1969) and Pendakur (1990) tried to understand the film industries from historical perspectives where Mansell (2004) finds internet as new media involving a significant change in social and economic relations. Exploring the history of new media based film distribution will help to understand the problems of traditional film distribution and the circumstances which made way for the new technology in the film distribution in Bangladesh. The growth of new media technology can be understood by the analysis of policies and politics, which surround the digitization process (Wasko, 2014, p. 267). In the case of film distribution where online distribution is not bound to a specific border because of its transborder nature, local culture is being affected by the global culture, which is also examined by the political economists.

Social totality suggests understanding society with a holistic approach from economic, political, social, and cultural perspectives (Mosco, 2009, p. 3). According to Wasko (2004), it studies the relationship among institutions, social relations, commodities and hegemony (Wasko, 2004, p. 222). It asks to understand the connections between the political and economic (Mosco, 2009, p. 329) where with the help of government policies, privatization and liberalization, the free market is created. The growth of multinational capital throughout the world has led to the development of many new centers of media production and has changed the direction of global and regional flows of media materials (Bhuiyan, 2002). Big foreign conglomerates as well as local companies have started online film distribution in Bangladesh, which has caused a change in the media flow where media materials like cinema are spreading from developing to developed areas of the globe.

Moral philosophy refers to the analysis of the economic system with the discussion of normative and moral issues (Wasko, 2004, p. 222) like 'justice, equity, and the public good' (Mosco, 2009, p. 32). Political economists emphasize understanding whether the public has access to goods equally or those which are commodified, where commodification transforms goods and services which are valued by their earning in the marketplace as communication technologies and contribute to the primary commodification process in the society (Mosco, 2009, p. 11). Internet accelerates the opportunities for commodification by increasing chances to measure and monitor (Mosco, 2009, p. 12), as in the case of online film

distribution, more control comes over the distribution process as the subscribers and the subscription fees are definite. Again, commodification is intensified by spatialization. Mosco (2009) described spatialization as "the process of overcoming the constraints of space in social life" (Mosco, 2009, p. 14). Harvey (1989) identifies "time-space compression" refering to the way that the world is becoming smaller (Harvey, 1989, p. 147), as communication and information technologies promote flexibility and control throughout the industry (Mosco, 2009, p. 14) and thus encompasses the process of globalization. Praxis is referred to as free and creative activities to change the world with actions (Mosco, 2009, pp. 34–35) "to transcend the distinction between research and policy" (Wasko, p. 223).

This political-economic approach is used to understand the new media based film distribution by inquiring about the purpose of using new technology. It helps to ask why new media technology is used in film distribution and who benefits from this? By taking a historical approach, this research explores why and in what context internet technologies have been used in film distribution in Bangladesh, what its consequences are and strives to identify its beneficiaries and those who suffer losses.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method. It utilizes in-depth interviews to collect data. As the study focuses on exploring new media based film distribution in Bangladesh and finding out the effects on traditional film distribution with a view to establishing new media based film distribution, people who are involved in film distribution, both traditional and online, make up the population of this research.

The only global video on demand (VOD) service provider in Bangladesh is Iflix, which has just started its journey in this country with the support of Robi Axiata Limited, a mobile network operator (S. K Paul, personal communication, March 1, 2018). Bioscope is another video streaming platform supported by Grameenphone, a telecommunications company (S. K Paul, personal communication, March 1, 2018). There is a Bangladeshi online VOD service provider named BongoBD (S. K Paul, personal communication, March 1, 2018). There are also some independent online distribution agencies such as Khona Talkies, IndieMinds Inc., who distribute short films made by Bangladeshi filmmakers to different festivals worldwide (S. K Paul, personal communication, March 1, 2018). On this note, it is relevant to mention that there are 219 enlisted members of the Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association (Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association, 2018).

Interviewees are selected specifically based on their involvement with the film distribution process. Ten film distribution companies have been selected as the sample. Among them, six are traditional film distribution companies randomly selected from the various companies that employ the 219 members of Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association, and four are online distribution companies. In-depth interviews of the ten respondents of the following ten

distribution companies have been taken to collect detailed information. Among them, four respondents are from four online distribution companies, who have been interviewed to understand the present situation of new media based film distribution in Bangladesh. The other six respondents are from six traditional distribution companies and have been interviewed to determine the impacts of new media based film distribution on traditional film distribution. All ten respondents who have been interviewed were asked to give suggestions for creating an effective film distribution system. All the questions were open-ended, and the respondents were encouraged to answer in detail. Follow up questions were asked based on the reply of the respondents.

Table 1. Interviewees (Online Film Distributors)

Category	Name of the Company	Name of the Respondent	Designation
Feature Film	BongoBD	Mushfiqur Rahman	Director, Content Acquisitions
Feature Film	Iflix	Sheikh Rifat Islam	Head of Marketing, Bangladesh & Nepal
Short Film	IndieMinds Inc.	Shubh Kumar Paul	Distributor and owner
Short Film	Khona Talkies	Aung Rakhine	Director

Table 2. Interviewees (Traditional Film Distributors)

Category	Name of the Company	Name of the Respondent	Designation
Feature Film	Ashirbad Chalacchitro	Razib Ahsan	Executive Director
Feature Film	Janani *Kothachitra*	Sajjad Hossain	Distributor and Owner
Feature Film	Jazz Multimedia	Abdul Aziz	Chairman
Feature Film	Tushar Kathachitra	Abdul Mabud Kawsar	Distributor and Owner
Feature Film	Malancha Chalacchitro	Miah Alauddin	Distributor and Owner
Feature Film	Modhumita Movies	Iftekhar Uddin Nowshad	Distributor and Owner

Consents of the respondents were taken before recording the interviews. A voice recorder was used to record the interviews of the respondents. After that, the interviews are transcribed verbatim. Inductive thematic analysis was adopted to analyze the in-depth interviews. Transcribed interviews have been coded and divided into thirteen themes based on the three research questions and then analyzed according to the themes.

Results

Online film distribution is an emerging sector in the film industry of Bangladesh. It has not yet become a primary distribution medium but it is developing to become the secondary distribution outlet.

New Media Distribution Process

There are two types of online distribution platforms in Bangladesh, feature film distribution platforms and festival distribution platforms. Three companies release feature films online, and two companies distribute short and feature films to international film festivals through the internet. Different companies employ different strategies for this distribution. Originating in Bangladesh, Bongo is an emerging multinational video on demand streaming site, which is now streaming in five South Asian countries: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh. It is planning to start streaming in another 31 countries, targeting Bangladeshi and native audiences especially who speak in Bengali. In Bangladesh, Bongo is streaming with the name BongoBD.

To start streaming videos, Bongo applied for a publishing license to the organization MCN (Multi Channel Network), which provides support to the online video streaming sites. After procuring the license, it became authorized to launch the streaming site. BongoBD started acquiring online distribution rights of different video content as well as films from the owners based on two payment processes, royalty and onetime payment. BongoBD is different from other streaming sites as it acquires complete distribution rights, which allows it to release the content not only on BongoBD but also on other platforms as it wishes. To protect the content copyright, BongoBD created a YouTube channel where the content management panel (CMS) provided by MCN allowed it to block the same video content owned by BongoBD from being uploaded on other YouTube channels.

It uploaded all the video content on the YouTube channel but kept it on private mode to create a demand for the content, with a view to starting a subscription-based platform. The company wanted to create more demand by keeping the video content in private mode for a long time but could not continue as some other companies started buying online rights of different video content published those on their YouTube channels. This created a pressure on BongoBD to publish their video content. However, BongoBD faced a problem in finding a suitable payment method to start a subscription-based streaming service. There is no common payment gateway for the subscribers in Bangladesh since very few people use credit cards here.

By this time, Grameenphone started Bioscope — a video on demand streaming service, and BongoBD allied with it by providing content and logistic support. Bioscope is currently providing free service and will later go for the subscription model. Bioscope streams the latest feature films along with other video content like music videoes, lifestyle content, drama, live television channels etc. BongoBD will support Bioscope for a certain period of time. The platform is preparing itself by collecting video content for a big startup as it already has a thousand feature films and various other types of content. It wants to start as a leading VOD streaming service in Bangladesh using Grameenphone as the payment gateway. BongoBD wants to emerge as a streaming site like Amazon or Netflix and plans to stream BongoBD Originals, which means, it will start streaming self-produced content at one point.

Originating in Malaysia, Iflix is a multinational streaming site which recently started its journey in Bangladesh. Iflix focuses on building a market in emerging economic countries where Netflix is not prominent yet. The respondent remarks,

> "Iflix is working in emerging South Asian markets like Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka and in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines apart from big markets like India where Netflix has huge investment…" (S.R. Islam, personal communication, May 8, 2018.)

Iflix releases the latest Bangladeshi feature films after their theatrical release. In a very short time, Bangladesh has become the fourth most important country for Iflix, placing next to the top three countries, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. It has started as the designated video platform of the telecommunications company Robi Axiata Limited. It seems to be a trend for every telecommunications company to try to provide a video platform as a value-added service nowadays. On the other hand, Iflix attached itself to Axiata after signing a contract that entails the platform to work in the countries where Axiata provides telecommunications services. This will solve an important issue as the telecommunications service itself will work as the payment gateway for the subscribers just as Grameenphone will function as a payment gateway for BongoBD. Robi is at an advantage here as Robi users will be able to watch Iflix content at a lower price than other telecom service users as Robi can design their data package offers by linking Iflix services.

Unlike Bongo, Iflix buys only the online rights of the content. In case of feature films, Iflix buys the online rights to release the films on its platform after the theatre release. Iflix releases Iflix Originals in other countries and is now planning to produce Iflix Originals in Bangladesh as well. It plans on introducing two systems to earn revenue, which are: the free tier, and the premium tier. The free tire will be advertiser-supported, and the premium tier will be subscription fee based. Content owners will be paid with the off-the-shelf (OTS) model, where they will get a specific amount of money for per hour view of the distinct amount of content. For example, in case of royalty, if someone provides 20 films to Iflix, 50% of the revenues from per hour view of the 20 films will be provided to the owner.

Khona Talkies and Indi Minds distribute short and feature films to different international film festivals. Khona Talkies also tries to distribute films to movie theatres after festival distribution and later to online platforms. It mainly focuses on alternative cinemas which are not well received in movie theatres. With this, it encourages promising film directors of the country by creating a demand for Bangladeshi films in the festival-oriented markets of the world. Indi Minds also distributes films to the festivals and helps the filmmakers aware of the rules and regulations of participating in international film festivals.

Reasons behind the Emergence of Online Film Distribution

There are four reasons that are vital to the emergence of online-based film distribution in Bangladesh. Firstly, the business of CDs and DVDs has been

destroyed by the rise of piracy in 2006–2007 as video content were copied from DVD and uploaded on online sites. According to one of the respondents,

> "In the mid-2000s, mainly in 2006 and 2007, it was found that the business of CD-DVD is not very profitable as their content became available to all because of piracy" (M. Rahman, personal communication, May 8, 2018.)

As a result, a massive demand for video content had emerged in Bangladesh, but there were no streaming sites to meet that demand at all. In this situation, the active streaming sites have been lauched with a view to capturing the market.

Secondly, the number of movie theatres have decreased from around 1,200 (Hayder, 2012) to 321 (Roy, 2016) in the last decade. The environment of the theatres that are still exhibiting films is not suitable for all kinds of audiences. On the other hand, the content of the cinemas in the last decades did not satisfy the audience, and this played a role in making the audience averse to watching films in theatres. But most people were still interested in films and were searching for a way to watch films without going to theatres. Again, in case of big cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, the theatre-going audience is bound to sacrifice extra time while commuting to the theatre due to traffic jam. These conditions amplified the need for VOD streaming services, which attracted the online distributors.

Thirdly, there are audiences for Bangladeshi content in different countries of the world, especially the people working in different foreign countries who want to watch Bangladeshi content. This was also one of the reasons behind launching multinational VOD streaming platforms.

Fourthly, an online film distributor needs to spend a minimal amount of money to distribute films. On the other hand, profit raising is a slow process but not limited, unlike the onetime profit from the theatres. For example, a standard film produced with 1 crore Tk may earn 80 lac from the theatres, 20 lac from television rights, and another 20 lac Tk from online rights. But in case of royalty based contracts, the income from online distribution may exceed 20 lac, depending on the number of hours the film was viewed for. This has made the content makers gain interest in online distribution.

Moreover, different companies that emerged to distribute films to film festivals have three reasons that contributed to their emergence. Firstly, independent cinema is not very popular in Bangladesh as they cannot gather much of the audience attention because it is alternative in content and presentation compared to the mainstream films. This is supported by a comment from one of the distributors who stated,

> "Most of the audiences in Bangladesh are not yet ready to watch these kinds of films" (A. Rakhine, personal communication, May 12, 2018.)

As a result, these independent cinemas are not welcomed by traditional distributors for theatre release. For example, *The Unnamed* (2016), *Kingdom of Clay Subjects* (2016), *Halda* (2017), all of these critically acclaimed films were released in very few theatres because of their alternative nature. So, production and distribution organizations like Khona Talkies came forward to help in making

and distributing these kinds of films to different foreign film festivals through the internet, where these are screened and critiqued.

Secondly, submitting films in foreign festivals is quite difficult, which is true for both feature and short films. Film submission needs to go through a rigorous and complicated process as many formalities with massive paperwork and a great experience is required. Some festivals ask to see "working stills" as in, photos that were taken during the film's shooting process. Again, they require a "logline" for the film, which describes the whole film in only one sentence. In some cases, film festivals demand a press release or press kit about the film. But in most cases, the filmmakers are not familiar with these formalities, which led companies like Khona Talkies and Indi Minds to come forward and take over as festival distributors.

Thirdly, in case of Indi Minds, it came into the market of festival distribution with a plan to become renowned as a festival distributor, which is vital for the career of the distributor in many ways. Distributing some good films creates a good track record for the distributor and contributes to developing the reputation of a distributor. To submit films, a fee needs to be paid; however, a reputed distributor with a good track record may get a certain percentage of discount and in some cases, be allowed to submit films completely free of charge. Again, very few festivals invite short filmmakers to the festival while providing full support, which includes air fare, lodging, food expenses etc. but a reputed distributor can manage full support for the director of the film. Moreover, the distributor of Indi Minds is developing a worldwide network with other distributors by distributes short films, with the intention of establishing a platform for short films in Bangladesh similar to that of the television channel "ShortsTV" in America.

Challenges to the Online Film Distribution

Distributors face various kinds of problems, as online film distribution is still a developing sector in Bangladesh. Firstly, most of the content makers are not interested in online distribution as they do not yet understand the way it works. Some relate it to piracy. Secondly, some content makers are not aware of copyright laws. Sometimes they use copyrighted music as the background score of their content. As a result, the content gets blocked with the claim of the owner of the music when uploaded on an online site. Therefore, distributors have to be very thorough to know the credibility of the content, but this easier said than done. The distributors are not well equipped enough to detect the copyrighted items in the contents before uploading. Thirdly, internet speed and costs are also vital concerns for online distributors. Slow internet speed costs more money if anyone wants to watch a film on a mobile phone using their telecommunications service provider as a payment gateway. For example, if it takes around one gigabyte of data (that would have to be bought separately from the telecom network provider) to watch a film, that costs at least 35-40 taka, and this makes it slightly expensive for the audience of Bangladesh. Fourthly, festival distributors face problems when they find films which do not meet the festival requirements as filmmakers are not aware of the different kinds of requirements of the festivals.

The telecommunications companies mostly occupy the emerging new media based film distribution sector of Bangladesh, as most of the streaming sites have been launched as value-added services of different telecommunications companies. As the sector has only just started to grow, it is contending with different kinds of problems at present.

Online Film Distribution: Blessing or Threat?

As online film distribution is a new concept in Bangladesh, some traditional distributors are not yet familiar with the processes that are involved. They are confused with the new type of film distribution and think that the consequences of online film distribution will be revealed by the way the capital invested on the films is recovered. There are different opinions among the distributors about the consequences of online film distribution. Some think online distribution will affect traditional film distribution by reducing the number of theatre-goers. If films can be found and watched online, people will lose interest in going to the theatres. As a result, the number of exhibiting halls will decrease, and thus theatre releases will be affected.

Most traditional distributors hardly face any challenge because of online distribution. They argue that online distribution is still a developing medium in Bangladesh. Only a few movies have been released online after their theatre release. It has not yet become the primary platform for distribution. Here, it is almost a secondary, sometimes tertiary platform as people still prefer watching films in theatres and will always do so if only a better environment is ensured in the theatres. Again, they believe that online distribution will strengthen the film distribution system in its entirety, because the potential revenue to be earned is unlimited here as it depends on the overall watch-time of the online audience. Additionally, online film distribution will reduce the cost of distribution, removing the intermediaries of the traditional film distribution process. There will be no need for the middlemen, such as booking agents and exhibitors, since the film will reach the audience directly from the distributor through the internet.

Suggestions for Developing an Effective Film Distribution System

Distributors suggested taking different steps to create an effective film distribution system based on new media. However, they also emphasized that it is impossible to create an effective film distribution system based only on new media. There needs to be coordination between traditional and online distribution as traditional distribution is still the primary distribution medium in Bangladesh. To increase content makers' interest towards online distribution, distributors need to make them understand the details of online distribution processes. In case of giving online distribution rights to the distributors, some content makers believe in revenue sharing, and others are interested in the onetime payment method. The revenue sharing method must be explained to them in a credible way. Again, content makers need to be made aware of copyright claims by arranging different kinds of workshops and training. In addition, proper logistic support must be

provided to detect the copyrighted items in the content before uploading said content on online platforms. Moreover, the data costs need to be reduced and high-speed internet should be ensured to push up the audience's interest in watching films online. On the other hand, festival distributors need to inform filmmakers about different types of requirements for the festival submissions.

Coordination of Online and Traditional Distribution Processes

Distributors think it is impossible to create an effective film distribution system based only on the new media. There needs to be a coordination of traditional and online distribution processes. In this case, theatre distribution must be given first priority. Exhibiting halls should be made attractive and comfortable for all kinds of audiences by upgrading and improving the environment. Theatres should be air-conditioned, the seats should be comfortable, screening quality and the sound system should be up to the mark. There needs to be a food court and other conveniences to ensure that the audience is being provided complete entertainment. Again, the number of theatres should be increased. Moreover, theatres can adopt a strategy first introduced by the American company, "MoviePass" (founded in 2011), which is called "Netflix for Theatres", allowing a subscriber to buy a movie ticket every day with a flat subscription fee for the whole month (Hardawar, 2012).

There should be a chain for film distribution. This means that, at first, the film will be released only in theatres, and then, after a specific period of time, the film would be available on online platforms with the pay-per-view payment mode or subscription mode and lastly, it would be shown on television channels. With this planned chain distribution, revenue will be generated from different platforms. For this type of coordination, efficient and robust leadership must develop. All these could be implemented successfully if it becomes possible to obstruct piracy using proper equipment to detect the guilty parties and sufficient involvement of law enforcement to ensure punishment.

Online film distributors also argued that the film production companies should develop their own online platforms like most Indian sites, such as Eros Now, Hungama, Jio Cinema etc. where all the films produced by one company will be available online after a certain period of theatre release, and the audience will be able to watch those films any time by paying a subscription fee.

Working at the Policy Level

Work needs to be done at the policy level to establish an effective distribution system. The coordination of policies for online and traditional distribution is especially important here. Online content making policy should be decided based on Bangladeshi social values and cultural norms. For example, BongoBD uploaded a music video *Nesha* sung and performed by Kushum Shikder on its YouTube channel, which was accepted by the YouTube authority as it did not get flagged in conflict with YouTube's content policy. However, after the video was released, a Supreme Court lawyer filed a legal notice to remove the music video from all

social media outlets, claiming that it falls under section eight of the Pornography Act 2012. The, the global policy may not be applicable to Bangladesh.

Distribution of revenues in case of online distribution and ticket pricing in traditional distribution should be determined by the government. Real box office information should be available online, which will help the producers to understand how the audience is responding to their films and this will help to improve the quality of the content in the long run.

A policy should be implemented to help improve the environment of the cinema theatres. For example, if anyone wants to import chairs to replace the old chairs in the movie theatre, they would have to pay a 37.07% tax (Bangladesh Customs: National Board of Revenue, 2018). Distributors suggest reducing the tax rates on importing theatre materials like the projector, chairs, air cooler, sound equipment etc. for a certain period of time, which will encourage the theatre owners to renovate the theatres.

The Producers and Distributors Association should be split into two associations. At present, a producer does not feel pressure to produce good films as they play the role of distributor for their own films as well. Having a separate distributor's association will help pressurize producers to make good films. On the other hand, The Producers and Distributors Association does not have an executive committee. As a result, there are no spokespersons to talk about the problems and policy development in the production and distribution sector. This gave rise to the monopoly of the booking agents as an intermediary force in the distribution system. The necessity of the executive committee can be proved through a real life example. When Jaaz Multimedia set up digital projectors in some theatres, it demanded that the distributors provide the rent for the projectors, when it is always the exhibitor's job to make arrangements for the projection. As a result, distributors had to spend extra money on the projectors till now, and no one was there to protest it. There is a dire need for separate executive committees for the separate associations of the producers and the distributors to get rid of these issues.

Making Good Films

There is no question that good films need to be made in order to attract the audience to both online and physical platforms of consuming films. To make good films, we need good artists. On the other hand, films should be made in accordance with the content making policies of online platforms, especially in cases of using original or copyright-free sound and music scores. Online streaming companies should invest in creating attention-grabbing websites, which is a must have from a global perspective to attract both foreign and local audiences.

Discussion

There are some key factors that contribute in the emergence of new media in the film distribution of Bangladesh. Three visibly prominent factors are: the rise of

piracy, the decreasing number of cinema theatres and the domination of booking agents, which is supplementing the arrival of new technology and facilitating changes in the distribution pattern.

The rise of piracy made the gatekeepers of traditional cinema around the world think about a new form of film distribution. This was called online distribution which first began in 1997 in North America (Cunningham et al., 2010, p. 121), but in Bangladesh, Bongo initiated it 15 years later in 2012. Fair (2006) stated that digital technology is considered to have accelerated piracy as it is easier to make clones with very little loss of quality (Fair 2006, p. 30). But in Bangladesh, piracy in the CD and DVD format made the gatekeepers welcome new media in film distribution. However, the problem of piracy has not become rampant in the case of online content as it is just an emerging sector and distribution sites have not yet started making their own contents which could be pirated.

The number of theatres has decreased as only 321 were found open for business in 2016 (Roy, 2016), a number that was as high as 1,200 in 2005 (Hayder, 2012). One of the key reasons behind this was the scarcity of good content, led by the internal problems of the distribution system in the last decades of the 20th century. In this system, there is an association for distributors, which is also the association for producers, as it is named Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association (BFPDA). This kind of weak policy, which can be understood with the third basic characteristic of the critical political economy, created havoc not only in the distribution sector but also in the entire film industry. When the distributor and producer is the same person, there is no compulsion for the producer to create good films since he or she can distribute any film he or she wants. Again, the environment and the service of the still running theatres have started deteriorating, which will lead those to get shut down in the near future.

At present, the association (BFPDA) is under a government administrator as there is no elected executive committee. There is no active executive committee and distributors cannot participate in policymaking. As there are no spokespersons to negotiate the various types of policies with the state, the decision-making power is secured one-sidedly by the state only. Taking advantage of this loophole, booking agents grew as an intermediary force determining the fate of a film as they do not select films for theatres based on good content but the casting, the glamour factor etc. As a result, theatres lost their appeal to the audience, and the business became a financial loss for the owners, which led them to close their theatres down.

All these hindrances have led to the emergence of new media based online distribution. But the new opportunities came with new challenges too. Online film distribution has several advantages. Traditional distributors are starting online distribution and making it a part of their whole distribution process, which will thereby change the structure of these traditional distribution companies. The rise of the internet has advanced the opportunities for commodification where the commodification of goods and services means transforming good and services into commodities which are valued for what they earn in the marketplace (Mosco, 2009, p. 11). Mosco (2009) found digital technology changing the structure of existing

companies (Mosco, 2009, p. 15) where online distribution has commodified films as it enabled films to reach their audience directly, providing them the opportunity to watch the film whenever they like in exchange for the money taken as a subscription fee. Pendakur (1990) espoused the same idea by describing the film as a "tangible product and intangible service" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 39).

This kind of flexible service promoted by new media technology is significant as it is changing the models of earning revenue. In case of theatre distribution, the generated revenue is distributed among several groups of people such as, the producer, the distributor, the booking agent and the exhibitor. But online distribution operates by sharing revenue only between the content provider and the distributor. As Zhu (2001) shows in his research, the distribution cost is reduced with the disintermediation in the motion picture value chain (Zhu, 2001, p. 275).

Spatialization, as in "the process of overcoming the constraints of space in social life" (Mosco, 2009, p. 14), encompasses the process of globalization, which is identified by Harvey (1989) as "time-space compression", suggesting the way the world is becoming smaller (Harvey, 1989, p. 149). Because of online film distribution, the audience need not go to the theatres, commuting to which consumes valuable time in big cities like Dhaka and Chittagong due to excessive traffic jam. Moreover, audiences from different parts of the world are now able to watch Bangladeshi films whenever and wherever they want.

Again, privatization and liberalization of telecommunications services have created the opportunity for free market by providing the telecommunications companies the chance to create online distribution platforms as most of the OLD platforms in Bangladesh are owned and controlled by these telecommunications companies.

But this coin has a flip side as well. Wasco (2014) emphasizes the assessment of media power by the discussion of class issues (p. 263). The internet can become a powerful medium of film distribution, but it is limited to the people of an economic class who can afford to buy a device like a smartphone, tablet, or personal computer and have access to the high-speed internet where most of the people in Bangladesh do not have access to the internet with minimum speed (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, 2019). This is an image of inequality because most of the people in Bangladesh are not able to access the internet. Again, inconsistency is found in the legislation as there is no specific policy for VOD services, but traditional films have to pass through the sensor board before being released.

Mosco (2009) describes social totality as understanding the society with a holistic approach from economic, political, social, and cultural perspectives (Mosco, 2009, p. 3) and especially the connections between the political and the economic (Mosco, 2009, p. 29). Traditional distribution and online distribution generate different social cultures. People go to watch cinema in theatres in their leisure time, maybe with family and friends, eat food, go shopping etc. It becomes an avenue for get-togethers, which strengthens social bonds. However, online film distribution encourages an individualistic culture where one can watch any film they wish in their free time. It works to loosen the social bond.

New media involve a significant change in social and economic relations (Mansell, 2004, p. 7). According to Wasko (2014), power relations can be analyzed by identifying the owners and controllers of online distribution outlets (p. 260). In Bangladesh, online distribution sites like Bioscope and Iflix are streaming as video platforms of telecommunications companies like Grameenphone of Telenor, a Norwegian multinational telecommunications company, and Robi Axiata Limited of Axiata Group, a Malaysian telecommunications company. Bioscope is run by BongoBD, which is the only emerging multinational subscription-based VOD service provider that originated in Bangladesh. BongoBD is now focusing on upgrading Bioscope as it uses Grameenphone as a payment gateway. Iflix is a subscription-based Malaysian VOD service, which is also attached to Robi Axiata Limited to have it as a payment gateway.

So, there are two types of controllers of the leading online film distribution companies in Bangladesh: telecommunications companies and multinational foreign and native VOD service provider companies. In case of Iflix and BongoBD, owners are multinational companies, and in the case of Bioscope, the owner is a telecommunications company. However, in every case, there is a telecommunications company as distribution companies need to make use of them as payment gateways. In addition to this, the telecommunications companies are trying to take control over the online distribution. Mahbub (2016) indicates that there is a silent war going on among the major telecom operators in Bangladesh for the control of digital service space. As foreign multinational companies are mostly investing in the sector, global capital is absorbing the local market here.

On the other side, BongoBD, the only Bangladeshi online platform, is also targeting to expand into the global market. Ahsan (2012) claims that there are active audiences for Bangladeshi films in different parts of the world. The term 'active audience' is defined by Kehoe and Mateer (2015) as the "emergence of a new group of technology-savvy consumers who primarily consume media product via the Internet" (Kehoe and Mateer, 2015, p. 99). Here, local capital is entering into a foreign market, changing the direction of the flow of media materials. Bhuiyan (2002) makes a relevant comment about the expansion of multinational capital and says that it has altered the direction of global and regional flows of media materials (Bhuiyan, 2002, p. 120).

On the other hand, festival distributors, Khona Talkies and Indi Minds are basically owned and controlled by independent filmmakers. They started this type of distribution to participate in different film festivals with their own films, and later transformed into business platforms.

A critical situation prevails in the distribution sector of the Bangladesh Film Industry. Distributors are economically endangered, and online distribution is perceived by them as a gateway to earn some additional revenue which led them to taking it positively. They suggest that a coordination of traditional and new media-based film distribution process take place. This has been described by Mosco (2009) who states that flexible companies make changes to the relationships with other companies by using communication and information systems like internet (Mosco 2009, p. 15).

Conclusion

This research tried to explore the present situation of new media based film distribution in Bangladesh. It tried to see how it affected the traditional film distribution system and tried to develop a framework for an effective distribution system. This research was conducted based on in-depth interviews of people involved in the traditional distribution system and new media-based distribution system.

Online film distribution is a growing sector in Bangladesh. Piracy, decreasing number of cinema theatres, increasing demand of Bangladeshi content in different areas of the world, less expense in online distribution, the production of alternative cinemas, and the urge to participate in different film festivals around the world made distributors start using internet technologies in film distribution. At present, the sector is controlled by telecommunications companies. Most of the sites started out as value-added services of the mobile network operators with a view to creating video streaming platforms and controlling the digital service space in Bangladesh. Even though some take the online distribution as a threat to theatrical distribution, the greater part of the traditional film distributors perceives online distribution as supportive to the film distribution system as it diminishes the cost of film distribution by disintermediating booking agents and exhibitors from the distribution process and increases revenue. A coordination between traditional and online film distribution needs to be facilitated to create an effective film distribution system, where the making of good films and working at the policy level are essential.

Limitations

It was challenging to find out the effects of new media in film distribution, as most of the traditional distributors had a hard time expressing their thoughts. Additionally, only ten distributors were interviewed for the research. It would be better to interview more traditional and online film distributors. Again, some YouTube based distributors could have been vital as respondents for the research, but it was not possible to interview them as they were unavailable during the data collection phase. Moreover, the research has not included audience perception about the new media-based film-watching platforms. If the opinion of the audience could be analyzed, the research would be more comprehensive. On the other hand, the research did not include the marketing strategy of online film distribution, which seems necessary for a better understanding of the sector. The absence of previous studies in this sector in Bangladesh also made this research very challenging.

Future Areas of Research

Future researchers can study the following aspects. First, the researchers can assess the audience perception of online media as a cinema watching platform in Bangladesh. Second, research can be done on the marketing strategies of online

distributors to understand the changing trends of film marketing in the era of new media. Finally, a comprehensive study on the whole film distribution system of Bangladesh can be done to understand the roles of stakeholders in developing an effective film distribution system.

Acknowledgements

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Ethiopian Media:
Journalists Trends of Using Sources in Reporting Stories

By Mulatu Alemayehu Moges[*]

Scholars in the field of media studies argued that journalists tend to choose the sources for their stories considering they are reliable, trustworthy, authoritative and able to articulate issues very well as well as accessibility of the sources to meet the deadline of reporting the stories (Gans, 2004; Cottle, 2006, 2009). However, the author of this article wants to insight a discussion on the relationship between journalists and sources in a country like Ethiopia, where the media are working under political pressures. To explore this issue, ten journalists and four editors/ editors-in-chief of selected newspapers, namely, Addis Admas, Reporter, The Ethiopian Herald and The Daily Monitor, were interviewed to get answers why they prefer to use certain sources when they need information to report cases such as conflicts in the country. The overall result of the qualitative data indicates that journalists self-censor in selecting sources to report, particularly, internal conflicts and other sensitive issues of the country. It is because they tend to use certain official sources as a mechanism of minimizing pressures and to be safe. Hence, the relationship between the sources and the journalists shall be discussed in line with journalists' self-censorship trends, journalists' safety and the media situation in a country, which the scholars have not yet discussed.

Keywords: Ethiopian media, conflict, self-censorship, source, political pressure

Introduction

Ethiopia has been described as a media-unfriendly country for more than two decades. This is because the heavy control of state and its restriction on the media environment has largely denied journalists, especially the independent press, to access information and report stories independently (Moges, 2017b; Stremlau, 2011). Recent studies on media development in the country show that the media in general, and private press, in particular, are suffering from limited access to public information from government offices (IMS, 2018; Moges, 2020). More paradoxically, critical voices of the press have been restricted and pressurized either directly or indirectly (Moges, 2017b; Stremlau, 2011; Price et al., 2009). While independent journalists endeavored to report critical issues, they have been faced with prosecution, harassment and torture for a longer period (Doha Centre for Media Freedom, 2013; Reta, 2013; Stremlau, 2011; Price et al., 2009). This might be the reason that journalists massively self-censor when they report critical issues of the government due to fear of those pressures and harassment (Moges, 2017a; Moges, 2017b; Skjerdal, 2010). The political pressures have been commonly

[*]Assistant Professor, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

clearly seen in the media scenario in the country. Many private news outlets were shut down, their editors were arrested, and many journalists fled to second countries, those remaining were working under a climate of fear. As a result, the country has been labeled as one of the worst hubs of journalists in the world until 2018 (Freedom House, 2019).

However, CPJ recently released a report that indicates no journalists are reported to be in jail in the current day Ethiopia.[1] This is wonderful news for those who aspire to ensure free press and freedom of expression in the country. The change has apparently happened in connection with the new political and economic reforms being carried out by the new leadership in the country.[2] As a result of these changes, the country has recently improved its ranks from 150 to 110 in the world freedom index in 2019.[3]

Despite these changes, in the current democratic reform in the country, there are claims that journalists have recently been arrested and harassed in some parts. There are also claims that journalists are still self-censoring when they report issues in the media. Hence, it is fair to look at trends of self-censorship, and safety of journalists in using sources to report the stories related to conflicts and other politically sensitive issues in the country. This article thus tries to answer:

- How do the Ethiopian journalists select sources to report sensitive issues such as conflicts in the country?
- Why do they give priority to some group, particularly to government officials in reporting those issues which are critical of the state?

By raising these questions, the article wants to see the link between using sources and journalists in Ethiopia, which has not yet been studied.

Literature Review

Relation between News Media and News Sources

Ostensibly, media and sources attract each other. It is because one cannot survive without the other. For instance, the sources, particularly the politicians and business-oriented elites mostly want the media to get access and send their message to the public (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). This ultimately helps them send their views and promote themselves to the large audience. Since they have ardent interest in sending their message to the public, elite sources systematically approach the media and are mostly quoted in the stories (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). As a matter of fact, politicians are very prominent people; subsequently,

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[1]CPJ (2019), Under Abiy, Ethiopia's media have more freedom but challenges remain. https://cpj.org/blog/2019/04/ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-press-freedom-reform.php or https://qz.com/africa/1494561/ethiopia-has-no-jailed-journalists-in-2018-the-first-since-20 04/. [Accessed 22 June 2019]

[2]Abiy Ahmed (Ph.D.) came to power in March 2018 as a Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

[3]Reporters without Border (2019). www.rsf.org/en/randing.

they easily draw the attention of the journalists as well as the large public.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that sources mostly attempt to influence the journalists to send their agenda to the public through the media. Particularly, public relations and communication officers always intentionally find the gaps in the media to instantly send their messages by grabbing journalists' attention (Franklin and Carlson, 2011). This is a common tactic what the spin-doctors do. As a result, public views get less attention in the media.

On the other hand, journalists want the sources to get their job done. While journalists are writing their stories, they need to get accurate and timely information from their sources. Mostly, journalists quote the idea of the sources to get the reliability of the story as well as to maintain the credibility of the news. In fact, some scholars articulate that news can be news when it is said by sources or what prominent sources said (Zoch and Turk, 1999).

In a very precise manner, Gans states, "The source-journalist relationship is symbiotic, for while the sources need the journalists, the journalists also need the sources and therefore cannot afford to alienate them" (2003, p. 51). This mutual interdependence between the two is nothing except - the journalists looking for information to be reported and the sources desiring access to the public is to meet their goals (Franklin and Carlson, 2011, p. 2). It is like a give and take relationship: Journalists need materials and sources need to get attention.

However, in selecting the sources to be interviewed or quoted to report a story, there can be differences. "Who will be the sources of the story" is in question in many media firms. And the media follow different aspects to select the sources. For instance, a study in Netherlands indicates that among the five elements such as credibility, knowledge, willingness, timeliness, and sources relations that can help the journalists to select the sources during crisis, the journalists are mostly inclined to use the familiar sources (van der Meer et al., 2017). This means that the selection of the sources has certain differences according to the nature of the stories and the media situation.

While explaining the use of sources by journalists, Gans (2004) also mentioned six important points that can mostly be considered by the media. One of these is past "suitability" of the sources to the media. This can go either how his voice or narration is most suitable to the media. Taking this advantage, journalists always rush to that particular source when they want to write stories. The "productivity" of the sources is also the second reason. Some sources have the ability to provide valid and timely information. As a result of this, they become the target/focus of journalists when they need information immediately. Similarly, the "reliability" of the sources is also the other value that the journalists are drawn to the sources. The process of collecting relevant information is a hectic task to most of the journalists. In addition, getting timely and reliable information makes the process more difficult and complex. Hence, according to Gans (2004), getting reliable sources easily is a relief for journalists. In connection with reliability, getting "trustworthy" information is also another element that may lead journalists to approach some sources. As journalists are always in need of correct information from diverse sources, reliable and trustworthy sources minimize the challenges of the journalists in getting accurate and timely information. The other one is how the

sources are "authoritative" (Gans, 2004, pp. 129–131). In fact, some other scholars also raised this concern. This is also reflected in the Ethiopian media. A study in 2006 indicated that journalists prefer to quote a source by taking how he/she is authoritative both in appointment and decision-making power (Dibaba, 2006). The journalists want to be heard, and they will get the audience if the story includes the voice of the authority. The last one is related to how the sources are "articulative" on a particular issue (Gans, 2004, p. 131).

There are scholars, for instance Wolfsfeld (2011), who argues that journalists are largely run after powerful sources. This is because the words of powerful politicians can usually be translated into power over the news media (Wolfsfeld, 2011, p. 09). Cottle on his behalf articulated that powerful persons or politicians are the dominant preference of the journalists. In his term, "Authority skew", Cottle (2006) and (2009) noted that journalists tend to quote military officials and political leaders in reporting serious cases, such as war and conflicts, of a country. His explanation is related to three points. The first one, the news value of the official sources is high and journalists prefer to source them. This can be related to the interests of the journalists to maximize the credibility of the news story. The second is related to meeting the deadline. While journalists are working under serious deadlines, they rush to gather the available information. And the third one is the most relevant information is available on the official sources (Cottle, 2006, 2009).

While the above mentioned scholars such as Gans (2004), Cottle (2006) and (2009) and Wolfsfeld (2011) have clearly articulated on journalists' ardent interests toward using official sources, they do not describe the other sides of their relation (sources and the media) by taking the context of the developing country, for instance Ethiopia, where the media situation is quite different from the west. This article argues that there are times that the journalists may consider some other issues that the scholars have not yet discussed in their literature. As the main interest of this article is to posit some points related to the Ethiopian media and its relations with sources, particularly officials in reporting political sensitive issues, such as conflict. To do so, it is fair to provide the Ethiopian media context. At this point, it is important to further look at the Ethiopian media, its situation, self-censorship trend, and safety of the journalists, to see the context.

Brief Description of Media Situations in Ethiopia

While the introduction of the two media laws, the Press Proclamation in 1992 and later on, the Ethiopian constitution in 1995 led to significant changes in the media landscape in the country. Nevertheless, things could not go in the same path especially after the highly contested 2005 national elections, where at least 14 journalists and media owners along with 62 opposition party members and supporters were incarcerated in Ethiopia (Moges, 2017b; Doha Centre for Media Freedom, 2013; Stremlau, 2011). This led to the shutting down of critical publications thereby creating a significant setback on the media industry (Doha Centre for Media Freedom, 2013; Stremlau, 2011; Price et al., 2009). The

crackdown also touched foreign journalists abroad and correspondents (including Swedish journalists) of foreign-based media. This put the state of press freedom in Ethiopia in the lowest ranking at the international index.[4]

As noted earlier, the media situation is recently promisingly progressing both in number and quality.[5] However, the overall media situations have not been described as smooth as they should be. It has been common for a longer period that research on Ethiopian media has been finally come up with conclusions that indicate the Ethiopia media are working under serious pressures by the government (Reta, 2013). These situations put the Ethiopian journalists to work in a climate of fear. When they report a serious case, they know what kinds of measures the government can take. So, one can relate the sources and the journalists' relation in terms of the media situation in a given country.

The other most important point that the article wants to bring to the center for this discussion is the trends of self-censorship of journalists in the Ethiopian media. The author argues that the relationship between the sources and the journalists might be affected by the extent of self-censorship in the country. Articles and academic discussion indicate that it seems a trend in self-censoring themselves in Ethiopian media. For instance, Skjerdal (2010) underscored that the Ethiopian media, particularly the state owned extensively self-censor themselves in reporting stories. Moges (2017a) also argued that due to an immense pressure by the state, the Ethiopian journalists do not hesitate in refraining from reporting some critical issues of the government. As a result of such a trend, the author tends to describe the media of the country shifting from self-censorship to silence (Moges, 2017b). On his part, Skjerdal (2010) argued that the self-censorship trends of the Ethiopian journalism are a result of "relegation of ethical responsibility; elasticity of journalistic editing; confidence in critical audiences; and adherence to social responsibility" (p. 98). However, these points may not work at all issues, for instance, during conflict reporting.

The Ethiopian media laws are also mostly not creating a conductive working atmosphere to the journalists. For instance, Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information (Proclamation No. 590/2008), and the Anti-Terrorism law (Proclamation No. 652/2009) can be mentioned as some of the draconian legal frames that limit the journalists' active participation in the media (IMS, 2018). The introduction of the Anti-Terrorism law in 2009 put freedom of expression in the worst state. Subsequent to the endorsement of the law, a number of prominent Ethiopian journalists, for instance, Eskinder Nega, Temesgen Desalegn and Riote Alemu (a courageous female journalist) were imprisoned under the law. Others were forced to leave the country fearing persecution. The rest of the journalists who do not move to the second country continue to live in extreme fear, which led them to self-censorship (Moges, 2017a). While this article has been written, the government of Ethiopia now embarks on enforcing to revise the media laws and others so as to be more workable for journalists. But, it is still fair to emphasize that journalists refrain from reporting serious cases, such as conflicts, or use the government officials as sources of the story.

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[4]https://rsf.org/en/ethiopia.
[5]Ibid.

It is also fair to look at how the safety of the journalists is ensured in the country. A close look at the Ethiopian media laws and policy, one cannot find a single article that deals with protecting the safety of journalists in the country. Being the case is sensitive, little is mentioned about the safety of journalists in Ethiopian laws and media working documents. For instance, not only the Ethiopian constitution (1995), which is considered liberal, but also the Proclamation of Freedom of the Media and access to Information (2008) do not state or put emphasis on the safety of the journalists. There are no articles that state about the fate of those journalists who are under certain danger. While there are quite many cases that affect the safety of journalists, there is no activity even to include some articles in the revised laws about journalists' safety in the country.

It is undeniable that the coming of Abiy Ahmed to power has relatively widened the media sphere. After a couple of months into power, Abiy freed journalists and political prisoners; people started accessing 260 previously blocked websites; the media, including the state broadcaster, started to broach subjects and include genuine public voices in their programs. However, the media freedom and the journalists' safety remain at a higher risk. In July 2018 two media outlets were forced out of the market for different reasons. Also, the crew of Diredawa Mass Media Agency was attacked while they were on the way to Addis Ababa to cover the visit of the Eritrean president, Isayais Afeworki. The safety of the journalists is highly important as many attack journalists with apparent impunity.

Methods of the Study

The nature of the study is purely exploratory. It mainly applied qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. As a tool, in-depth interviews were used to collect data from relevant key informants from the Ethiopian media. A total of fourteen journalists, editors and chief editors of four newspapers, namely *Addis Admas, Reporter, The Daily Monitor* and *The Ethiopian Herald* were included in the study. While the first three newspapers are privately owned, the fourth one is state owned. *Addis Admas*, a weekly and *Reporter*, a biweekly is published in *Amharic* Language, which is a working language of the federal government of Ethiopia. The *Ethiopian Herald* and *The Daily Monitor*, which are daily, are published in English language. All four newspapers can be described popular due to their relatively wider circulation and long-lived newspapers in the country.

The focuses of the interviews were mainly on the trend of conflicts' reporting in their newspapers. What kind of relationship between journalists and sources do they have? What are the driving forces the journalists to select sources to report sensitive issues? What are the main concerns or challenges in selecting the sources to report cases, particularly serious political and conflict issues in the country? These interview questions were prepared based on the research results of the previous studies. For instance, a study carried out earlier indicates that the majority of the sources of the conflict stories reported from 2006 to 2013 were found to be government sources (Moges, 2017b). Also, Reta (2013), Skjerdal (2012) indicated that government sources take the highest share to be quoted in the news stories of

the Ethiopian media. Similarly, data collected from the selected newspapers from a period of 2006 to 2013 clearly showed that journalists do prefer to quote government officials dominantly. As this empirical data indicated the journalists tend to include the voice of the officials while reporting conflict issues in the country. It should be noted that reliance on government officials as sources is not particular to Ethiopia, but common in news media in other countries. Based on the results of the studies that mentioned above as an example, the author sets the interview questions to the working reporters and editors, and editors-in-chief. After getting consents from them, thorough interviews were carried out with them.

Reporters, editors and editor-in-chiefs are the key informants of this study. It is because they are the core of the newspapers in reporting stories and deciding on the contents of the newspapers. And it is believed that they would be the right experts to talk about how and why journalists mainly use government sources while reporting internal conflicts issues in Ethiopian newspapers.

Data collected through interviews from these key informants (from March 2014 to June 2014) were transcribed and summarized. Then, the data presented qualitatively and discussed thematically along with the scholar's ideas and previous studies.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Most key informants of the study indicated that they have their own criteria to pick the right sources of the information to write the stories. This can be, for instance, prominence of the sources, issues - sources relations (sources relevant to the issues), accessibility, and giving voice to all. An informant from the *Addis Admas* newspaper noted that she always gives attention to top political leaders in the country. It is because her interest is dealing with hot political issues of the country. Her argument is quoting somebody who is less prominent does not make her story more readable. Another informant from The Daily Monitor also indicated that he prefers to call government officials who are mostly available or ready to give information. It is all about the accessibility of the sources, which is one of the major challenges in the Ethiopian media. In such cases, the sources and journalists' relationship can be similar to what the scholars (for example, Gans, and Cottle) noted.

However, the journalists could not rely on those criteria when it comes to some critical issues of the country. For instance, the key informants of the study were asked about 'who are your preference sources of the stories while you are reporting sensitive issues, for instance conflicts and political controversies in the country'. Their answers are quite similar with the results of previous studies carried out in Ethiopian media. The informants say the government sources are more preferable to them to interview and collect information. However, their reasons are quite different from the previous studies that have been carried out not only in Ethiopia but also in other countries. It is also different from the scholars' ideas.

As a reason, one informant, for instance, noted that when the case is very

sensitive, it is wise to approach the government sources. It is because the government sources have right information about the cases, and this helps the journalists to report the story more accurately. Similarly, another informant of the study also noted that since the cases are more related to crises, they do prefer to quote the police sources. It is because they are the responsible body of the case.

Another informant on the other hand raised the issues of timeliness. Since he is working in the newsroom of The Ethiopian Herald, he needs the information as soon as possible to be published. The story may lose its news value while the journalist searches for more inaccessible sources, which is also another challenge in Ethiopia (Moges, 2020). The journalists inclined to fetch information available in the government offices in reporting issues of conflicts and other sensitive cases. As noted in the data, the Ethiopian journalists tend to report the case immediately by using the government sources. This is because it is in the interest of the journalist to send the information to the audiences as soon as possible, though they are in a very critical time. There are scholars who describe how tough it is to report issues in a limited deadline from a "dangerous environment". Particularly, when journalists report about conflicts and war, they tend to use the government and army generals on both sides (the protagonist and antagonists) (Ibrahim et al., 2011; Cottle, 2006, 2009).

In addition to the above points the key informants mentioned most journalists tend to collect information from the top government officials, which they believe it is safe to quote them. According to the informants, ostensibly, the government seriously follows what is reported about conflict, and how it is reported about conflict in the local media. From the trend, the government reacts based on the extent and the way stories have been reported by the journalists. This might be a bad cause for harassment, intimidation, or prosecution of the journalists. An informant particularly noted that when it comes to serious conflict cases, most journalists are in dilemma between meeting the government interest (not to report the conflicts or reporting the case in line with the interest of the state) and meeting the public right to know (report it critically, then, the journalists may be harassed). What most journalists do, as the informant noted, they prefer to report the stories by quoting the government officials. In most cases, such stories may not be considered as neutral. However, journalists could be safe and free from a serious harassment and pressure from the state. It is because they collected the information from the government officials.

What makes it unique now, including the private press, which have been described as relatively critical of the government, have tended to be reserved themselves to report issues, including conflicts. This indicates that they are developing the wrong practice of journalism. As noted earlier, various studies on Ethiopian media indicated that journalists tend to collect information from top officials of the state while they are writing news stories. For instance, a study conducted on various issues in the country showed that government officials take the lion's share of the media coverage (Asegidew, 2013; Gusu, 2013; Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012; Dibaba, 2006). A study on conflict reporting on Ethiopian media in 2017 also revealed similar results. More than two-thirds of the sources are from the top officials of the government (Moges, 2017b).

To elaborate and discuss the reasons behind the strong interests of journalists to use government voices in Ethiopian media, the author wants to present four important points. These are the media laws, the media situations, self-censorship, and the level of protecting safety of journalists in the country. These four points at least can show how and why the journalists tend to rely on the government where the media work in critical time. In other terms, the journalists and the sources' relationships is determined by the extent of these points. These points are the center for the discussion next.

The journalists in the study mentioned one most important point that this article wants to put an emphasis. They noted that when there are political sensitive issues, they either report the cases by using government sources or disregard the issues. It is because when they use top officials to report the story, then, there is less probability of direct and indirect pressures from the government. Whereas, when they report cases by using other sources, though the story is true, there is a high chance of facing various pressures from the state and the security. So, the sources and the journalists' relationship are determined by the extent to which the media freedom prevails in the country. Since the journalists have been working in the climate of fear, they tend to use the government voice during conflict and crises. As a result of fear, the journalists tend to self-censor in a different way. While there may be many options to get the information from quite different and alternative sources, the journalists stick with using the government sources. If the journalists do not get the information from the government officials, then they surely do not report due to the fear of harassment. This is the other form of self-censorship of journalists in Ethiopia.

The main reason for such poor reporting of the cases was the fear of the government that may put heavy pressures on the journalist after they report the stories. Key sources to this study stated that they do not have an ardent interest to report critical issues of the government during Meles and Hailemariam regimes. When they report those critical stories either they should come from the state themselves or the government should be quoted. As a result of this, large numbers of stories have included government voices. A previous study found that Ethiopian journalists were so hesitant to report internal conflicts in the country without the voice of government officials (Moges, 2017b). Key sources of the study noted that some journalists from the state and non-state-owned media in the country prefer not to report serious cases, such as conflicts, due to fear of political pressures and harassment from the government. Then, it seems to be a trend that the journalists do not want to report critical issues unless otherwise the government officials say it officially.

This study has identified some unique nature of the sources and the journalist relations in terms of the political, and media situations in the country. Firstly, the state may want to use the media and propagate its message dominantly, which could enhance the legitimacy of the power. This can be reflected that the government officials can systematically use the media largely to denounce the cases, conflict cases mostly, and major actors in the conflicts. This also helped the sources undermine the voice of the other sides (perceived as antagonists) (Moges, 2017b). Secondly, it can be argued that since the government is in charge of all

responsibilities of the nations, there could be a high chance to be quoted by the media (Keeble, 2006; Gans, 2004). Thirdly, it is the fear of the journalists and they do self-censor while they are selecting the sources, which is not yet articulated by scholars.

The safety of the journalists is also another concern that should be looked at here when dealing with the sources and media relations in Ethiopia. As mentioned elsewhere above, even the laws do not support the media. For instance, there is no law that renders to protect the safety of the journalists in the country. This leads the journalists to work under the climate of fear.

In addition, research on media in the country shows that the media in Ethiopia are one of the weakest institutions that are bogged down with challenges from both within and outside media firms. The government has long been decried for stifling media freedom through restrictive laws that resulted in incarceration, exile of journalists, and closure of critical media. For instance, restrictive laws still exist in the country that put the journalists to work under a certain pressure. Anti-terrorism law can be mentioned as case. As informants noted that they do not know how the executive body can interpret a story by the laws, particularly anti-terrorism law, which may take a journalist to jail between ten to twenty years, if it is found guilty. This indicates that the laws do not create a conductive media environment that makes the journalist free to report the stories by incorporating diverse ideas from different sources.

Conclusion

Ethiopian journalists have been exercising their freedom of expression under several challenges. Some of them have faced serious harassments, arrests, and pressure while others are forced to leave the country. Ethiopia, being in the lowest rankings of press freedom indices for more than two decades in a row now, is a country where the safety of journalists has always been at risk. And, plenty of examples are available to make the case. This frustrates the journalists, particularly who work for the privately owned media, to report cases of conflicts. As a result of fear of pressures, local journalists dominantly safely use government sources as a mechanism of protecting their safety. Also, journalists showed high interests in selecting government sources by ignoring other relevant sources. This can be described that the Ethiopian journalists self-censor when they select sources of the story: it is not how the sources are relevant, rather it is how his/her position is and how it protects the journalists. It is one form of manifestation of self-censorship in the country. While Cottle (2006) and (2009), Gans (2004) and others listed out some other reasons mentioned in this article earlier, however, the Ethiopian journalists mostly relied on government sources as a mechanism of protecting themselves from pressures. Because there are no laws that protect the safety of journalists, they are either forced to be silent or use the government sources. Hence, high dependency of the journalists on the government voices can be looked at the prevailing freedom of the media in a country. This indicates that the relationship between the journalists and the sources in the context of Ethiopia

media can be differently explained. The trends of self-censorship, the extent of pressures and the protection of journalists' safety shall be taken into account.

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