CIVIC JOURNALISM AS A PHENOMENON OF DIGITAL CIVILIZATION

GRETA GEVORGYAN ⓘD *

Abstract
This article explores the role of citizen journalism in terms of promoting civil society and democracy. Civic journalists, as well as citizen journalists, contribute to public discussion and try to voice and address many issues that have been ignored by traditional journalism. This study aims to explore the relevance of citizen journalism in the modern world. In addition, a negative phenomenon that is widespread in social networks and infringes on human rights, fake news and hate speech on social networks is investigated. Combining qualitative discourse analysis, comparison and description, the study shows that the role of citizen journalism is growing in many countries. However, hate speech and fake news on social media hinder the development of citizen journalism. To this end, further legislative and democratic measures must be taken. However, the most effective way to combat the obstacles to citizen journalism is to promote media literacy, which will enable everyone to comparatively analyze information, check the message and develop critical thinking.

Introduction

> *"Whoever controls the media, controls the mind."*
> *Jim Morrison*

Political leaders tend to think that they are in control of everything that takes place in political life. In fact, with the advent of new media, which have emerged as powerful platforms for political communication, the role of political leaders has changed to a great extent. It is thought that media tools often guide politicians to plan the strategy that will help them to achieve their goals. Serving this goal, nevertheless, new media tools make their beneficiaries act according to their rules and principles, which considerably change the dynamics of political communication. It has commonly been assumed that nowadays

* Greta Gevorgyan is an MA in Human Rights and Democratization in the Caucasus of the Center of European Studies at Yerevan State University.
Email: gretaggevorgyan@gmail.com

neither political actors nor political procedures influence the behaviour of citizens but mainly the information that is conveyed through the internet.

Recently, there has been renewed interest in social media because they made a revolution in the sphere of information communication technologies. Some years ago, internet was considered the source that aimed to provide its users with information, but today the relation between the internet and its users has changed due to Web 2 tools. Nowadays people not only receive information through the internet but also share the information, concerns, or opinions they have. There is some evidence to suggest that social media give opportunity to citizens directly or indirectly become active participants of the events taking place in political life.

Civic journalism is a major area of interest within the field of new media. A great deal of previous research into civic journalism has focused on the fact that the main aim of democracy is to develop genuine society, which can be implemented through the development of civic journalism. In its early stage of its formation civic journalism related to elections and electoral campaigns, but later, when the usage of internet became widespread, other community issues have been drown attention to as well (Ruusunoksa 2006, 4; Nuernbergk 2022).

Ahmad, Popa, Kulesha, and Romero showed in their study that social media and web technologies play an important role in the life and work of a transformational society (Ahmad and Popa 2014; Kulesza 2014; Romero 2014). There is a growing body of literature that recognises the novelty of these technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many) (Ahmad and Popa 2014; Kulesza 2014; Romero 2014).

Since the fast proliferation of the internet technologies the number of the internet users has drastically increased. Every day millions of people make use of social media for both communicating with each other and exchanging information. The topicality of the research is that social media have turned into a powerful tool, which influence both everyday life and political life. Evidence suggests that civic journalism is among the most important factors for mobilizing and guiding the society, influencing upon electoral behaviour, and shaping public opinion.

While social media contribute to transparency and accountability of political actors and serve as a significant platform for public debates, they also contribute to the incitement of violence, hatred, and defamation through fake news and hate speech.

The aim of the research is to assess the importance of civic journalism in the modern world and reveal the border between the freedom of speech and fake news.

This paper consists of two parts focusing on the differences between civic journalism and citizen journalism as well as freedom of speech and fake news.

Basic Definitions of the Terms "Civic Journalism" and "Citizen Journalism"

The emergence of the internet and new technologies has greatly influenced the forms of communication. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in non-traditional type of journalism. The latter has a pivotal role in modern information societies. In order to understand and analyse the essence, potential, and scopes of influence of non-

traditional forms of journalism, it is necessary to study definitions of the terms "civic journalism" and "citizen journalism."

There are a wide range of definitions on civic journalism. In some sources the term "public journalism" is used instead of civic journalism. Civic journalism can be defined as socially active journalism. Its goal is not limited to covering news or presenting certain facts. The ultimate goal of civic journalism is to influence the life of the society (Predmerská 2019). It is thought that this new kind of journalism has the mission of raising some issues that are vital to society and finding solutions to those issues.

In an analysis of public journalism, researchers found that the role of public journalism will be more significant when it obtains the potential of influencing news audiences and persuading citizens to be more active in civic sphere. Civic journalism unites the efforts of the citizens and fosters discussions on the problems that are important for the society (Walters 2011, 8). In general terms, this means that the active engagement of citizens in civic life is of key importance for the development of civic journalism in the country.

Another significant aspect of civic journalism is that it is a platform, which has a goal to build strong relation and communication, on the one hand, between journalists and their audience, on the other hand, between the audience and civic life (Ahva 2011, 119). In this chain audience plays a significant role because it makes the struggle of the journalists more democratic, citizen-centered, and effective. It has commonly been assumed that without the active participation of citizens in the journalistic activities, the latter would be conceived as biased. A possible explanation for this might be that traditional journalists are to be impartial and neutral, and the active engagement of citizens in their activities proves that journalists express the voice of the society and they do not pursue their own interests.

Ahva notes that civic journalism should provide citizens with the information, which is perceivable and practical. In this light, civic journalism turns into a service for the readers that are viewed as citizens. Civic journalism is aimed at engaging citizens in public life. As regards the information source of civic journalism, it is quite different compared to conventional journalism. The latter mainly concentrates on elite, whereas for civic journalism everyday life of the citizens is the main source of information. Moreover, citizens get the opportunity to create topics and design an agenda themselves (2013, 10).

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that civic journalism is one of the important factors contributing to the development of civic society and democracy. It is a very good platform for people to present their interests, complaints, or demands.

Having defined what is meant by civic journalism, it is necessary now to move on to discuss the essence of citizen journalism. People who collect information and disseminate it, can be considered as citizen journalists. There are two main expressions introduced by National Association of Citizen Journalists: accidental journalist and citizen journalist. Accidental journalist is the person who witnesses events and shares information including photos and videos on social media platforms. The people who take actions on investigating some occurrence on their own, writing reports about it online, or expressing their anxiety, are considered to be citizen journalists. The latter sometimes

act like professional journalists. That is the reason why they are often called enthusiastic citizen journalists (Macharashvili 2012, 8-9).

It is thought that the aforementioned differentiation of citizen journalist and accidental journalist is quite appropriate. There is some evidence that not all the citizens who have taken part in some events once decide to publish materials online pertaining to the event, are citizen journalists. The latter should be actively engaged in civic life, be interested in its different issues, and aspire to share information with other citizens. It has been reported that regularity is one of the key aspects of citizen journalism. Without this element, the activities of citizens can be perceived not more than information transfer.

Citizen journalism can also be defined as an activity when nonjournalists collect, write, and report news. Nowadays people are granted a great opportunity to make use of the internet, get information, and provide others with information. This means that people can become their own journalists. But here another interesting question arises. When everyone can write and share information, how nonjournalists will differ from professional journalists. One of the main differences between these two types of journalism is that unlike citizen journalism in case of traditional journalism the content of the materials is edited before dissemination (Walters 2011, 24).

In his analysis of citizen journalism, Örnebring notes that any blogger, any person who is active on social media, comments on some posts can be considered as a citizen journalist. Citizen journalism is the first stage of the institutionalization of new media. It is defined by the author as an activity of socially biased journalists who aspire to make reforms in the country and make it more progressive (Örnebring 2013, 35-38).

In the countries where mass media is under the control of political authorities, citizens often get information that is not credible and tends to manipulate public opinion. In such countries the activities of citizen journalists are viewed by the political elite as cyberdissidence (Bentley 2011; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022; Noor 2017).

It is thought that in the countries where the freedom of internet is high, consequently, social media are not controlled by the state, it is much easier to organize civic disobedience and implement revolutions. Thus, it is quite possible to make changes in the country thanks to citizen journalism. It gives a great opportunity to citizens for self-organization and self-regulation (Wu and Wall 2019).

Lastly, civic journalism and citizen journalism are strongly interrelated. They are modern manifestations of traditional journalism. Although different methods are used by the aforementioned types of journalism, their ultimate goal is the same - to inform citizens, to find solutions (Barnes 2012; Campbell 2015; Simons 2016).

Mediacracy: Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Information Manipulation

The issue of citizen journalism responsibility is intrinsically complex. Its essence lies in the awareness and desire to maximally effectively realize the national interests, the disposition to solve the problems of the region, country, and the world in the interests of all citizens, of all humankind. But due to social differences and the unequal understanding by various social forces, the media and individual journalists of the essence of the civic duty, they are recognized differently in a concrete and meaningful

way during real journalistic actions. However, for all social and political differences, there is a framework of civic behaviour that requires a responsible approach. Their essence is connected with the development of an audience of civic consciousness, the formation of an adequate citizen, responsible and active. First of all, the journalist is responsible for developing their civic position, a system of socio-political guidelines, and a set of attitudes in the sphere of their narrow specialization. The question is what this position will be: as close as possible to the objective or subjectively serving the private egoistic interests of any group that stands apart from social development or even interferes with it? Of course, under conditions of pluralism, in ideology, politics, culture, when the range of opinions is extremely wide, the journalist has the right to take any position. But a responsible choice requires serious consideration of the position from the point of view of how it meets the interests of the people and the general humanistic requirements of social development, how much protection of the needs of the "unit" is combined with the requirements of the "whole." In other words, civil liability is high when these two groups of interests are compatible and combined in a position. Therefore, the choice of media with its direction and features of the information policy also refers to the sphere of civil liability. The journalist then works fruitfully and behaves responsibly when they are "in their circle" of like-minded colleagues, when there is no conflict between their convictions and the direction of the media. Can the journalist's behaviour be called responsible if they draw a line in their works with which they do not internally agree? It is the agreement with the editorial staff on fundamental issues that allows them to be creatively independent, work without regard to possible rejection, not to act as a conformist or non-conformist to the direction adopted by the editorial board, but to be a convinced defender of the accepted common line. Of course, when carrying out the chosen line, various nuances may arise, certain "correction factors" may be proposed, which appear as a result of an independent unexplored study of life. And since the "world view" is different in different media and different journalists, then, of course, they are also responsible for what and how they report on other approaches and opinions. Responsible behaviour is the antithesis of silence and, all the more, distortion of other positions, rudeness, phrase-mongering, verbal tricks in the debate. A journalist's civil duty is the need to speak out against publications and programs if deviations from the truth, false "moves" in argumentation and conclusions, and other violations of the requirements of objectivity are found in them. In this case, it is important to respect the dignity and sense of proportion, to prevent literary horsemanship, and even less to elevate minor errors of other journalists to the rank of fundamental errors. The point is not to turn from a critic in the name of truth into a critic, from a responsible politician to a cheap politician, when the place of concern for public needs is counted on easy popularity. In this case, both the controversy and the discussions, no matter how sharp they may be, should be conducted from the standpoint of high civic responsibility: after all, the difference of views has a common solid foundation - this is concern for the development of the country and the world. Responsibly formed in this vein, the civic position during implementation has another important consequence. In the course of comparison of views, in the process of polemics and discussions, positions and approaches, ideas and decisions will come closer and are increasingly filled with constructive content for the benefit of both "the parts" and the "whole" in the long term of the humanistic development of society as a whole. Consequently, for journalism and a journalist, responsibility to society is put in the first place for the measure of conformity

of the position and the nature of its implementation to the objective needs of social development. Hence, the responsibility of the journalist for the full awareness of the audience about what is happening in the world, for the system of assessments and conclusions.

Recently, there has been renewed interest in fake news. The latter, unfortunately, has become an indispensable part of media, politics, and everyday life of information recipients. This phenomenon has become so influential and widespread that a comprehensive investigation should be carried out in order to understand where the border is between fake news and freedom of speech.

The term "fake news" can be traced back to the 19th century when the word "fake" was a novelty. In Merriam–Webster Dictionary it is written that before the 18th century, instead of "fake news" the collocation of "false news" was used (Bayer et al. 2019, 22).

The phenomenon of fake news has been discussed more widely since the US presidential election in 2016 when the electoral campaigns were accompanied by offense and ugly name-callings. For instance, during the presidential debate on the Fox news television channel, Donald Trump accused Ted Cruz's father, Rafael, who was a Christian clergyman, of having relations with Lee Harwey Oswald. As it is known, on 22 November, 1963, the abovementioned person killed John F. Kennedy who was one of the favourite leaders of the American people. The death of beloved President was a real tragedy for millions of Americans who watched President's funeral live on TV.

Donald Trump arose questions about the association of Rafael Cruz and Lee Harwey Oswald and assassination of John F. Kennedy. Trump referred to one of the newspaper reports stating there had been a collaboration between the father of the competing candidate and Oswald before the assassination of the President. The newspaper also published a photo of Oswald with a person who was thought to be Rafael Cruz.

Although the National Enquirer is the newspaper popular with its false information, many voters believed in that story and decided not to vote for Cruz. In fact, the story was fictional. It was a bright example of fake news (Miller 2019, Chapter 1).

Several definitions of fake news have been proposed. Fake news is defined by Allcott and Gentzkow as "to be news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers" (2017, 213). The definition by the authors rules out certain cases that can be considered as fake news:

1. Reporting mistakes that were not made on purpose, such as the inaccurate report that the President of the USA took out the bust of Martin Luther King Jr., and it was no longer on display in the Oval Office in the White House;

2. Rumors that do not have any specific source or do not stem from a certain news article;

3. Conspiracy theories, which are not easy to confirm as right or wrong, and they come from individuals who think that they are right;

4. Satire that is unlikely to be misinterpreted as true;

5. Incorrect contentions made by political actors;

6. Reports that are biased and confusing but not completely falsified (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017, 214).

The data reported here appear to support the assumption that intention is the most important element in differentiating fake news from the news or information that may

contain inaccuracy. The agents of fake news represent the information they provide as objective reality, they insist on having factually correct information. It is a widely held view that reporters usually apply fake news in order to cast doubt on the news sources that have the reputation of being reliable, distort reality and as a consequence appear in a favourable position.

The notion of fake news is even more vague in the legislative documents, as proved by latest discussions on the efforts to implement the legislation of national anti-fake news. For instance, in France the law on "manipulation of information" defines fake news as "any allegation of a fact that is inaccurate or misleading", which is likely to "distort the fairness of the election," if the dissemination of the information on the internet has been "deliberately" and "in an artificial or automatized and massive way." In Italy, in 2017 there was a huge discussion on the bill against fake news, which was defined as following "false, exaggerated, or biased" news articles online. However, the bill was not adopted. In Germany in the same year NetzDG law did not provide a clear definition of fake news, nonetheless, it inspired many countries to elaborate and adopt anti-fake laws (Bayer et al. 2019, 23-4).

Since the term "fake news" is vague and often times it is too difficult to realize if the reports containing incorrect information might be considered as fake news or not, Wardle and Derakhshan tried to differentiate types of information that are not factually correct.

Figure 1: Types of information disorders
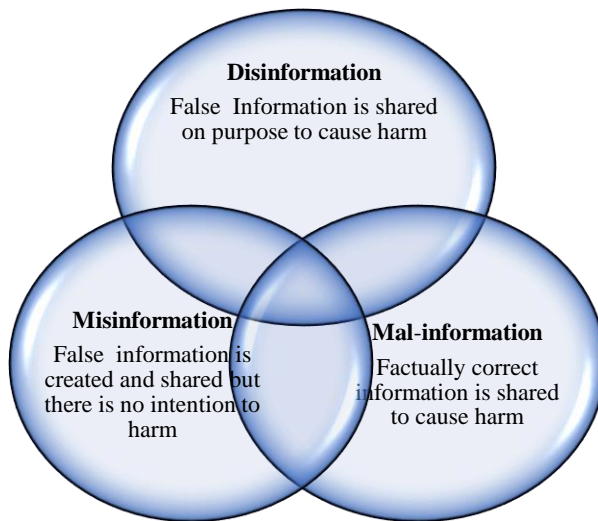
Source: Wardle and Derakhshan 2017

As shown in Figure 1, all the three types of information are interrelated. The main distinction between them refers to the intention of dissemination information and the veracity and authenticity of the information or news provided.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) use examples from the 2017 French Presidential election and show the differences between disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information.

One of the biggest deceits of electoral campaign in 2017 was the emergence of the duplicated version of *Le Soir*, Belgian newspaper with a fake article stating that Saudi Arabia was funding Emmanuel Macron. Another example relates to the dissemination of the false reports that Macron opened an offshore bank account in the Bahamas. Lastly, in Twitter some users shared articles with identical hashtags and rumors that Macron was in a secret relationship with his step-daughter.

The abovementioned examples are considered to be disinformation because they are not based on reality and have the intention of decreasing the political image of the candidate during the electoral campaign and drive potential voters away from a candidate.

The attack on the Champs Elysees in 2017 brought about a lot of misinformation as usually occurs during the emergency situations. Many internet users unwittingly posted lots of false information, such as the news about the murder of a second policeman. In this case the individuals who shared misinformation, did not have any intention to harm anyone, on the contrary, they attempted to be helpful.

One of the evident instances of mal-information refers to the email leaks of Emmanuel Macron two days before the final vote. The information in the emails was genuine, but during the campaign Macron and his team apparently used incorrect data to eliminate any negative consequences of the information leak (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017, 21).

The aforementioned examples prove that it is not so easy even for European Union member countries to decide on the definition of fake news and find certain mechanisms to struggle against this sinister phenomenon. It is thought that the main causes and goals of the fake news should be examined in order to diminish it or at least reduce the level of its wide application and dissemination.

The following is a brief description of the reasons why fake news is created. The first motivation of creating fake news is pecuniary - to earn money. They run advertising-supported websites. The sum of the money depends on the number of people visiting websites. The more visitors are, the more money advertisers give the websites. Hence, the sites try to attract internet users to visit their sites and read those stories with sensational headings. Some headlines are too abusive and fierce, nevertheless, site operators state that reports having such titles are more clicked and read by visitors. It is interesting that even the people who know that the headline is likely false, they also continue reading the article containing fake news.

Another reason why fake news has been created is to have an impact on voting behavior of the citizens. For example, during the US presidential election in 2016, a host of fake news reports appeared about the Democratic candidate, the former secretary of state Hillary Clinton. One of the articles was titled "FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apartment Murder-Suicide." The main aim of such fake news is to influence the opinions of voters, either taking them out of the electorate of a certain candidate, or convincing them of being in the electorate of the candidate's opponent (Miller 2019).

This strategy is typical to electoral campaigns when different political parties and candidates struggle for the political power. Even if they are not able to receive the votes

by particular voters, due to fake news articles they try to drive potential voters from a political party or a candidate, thus increasing their chances of receiving more support.

It is thought that the dissemination of fake news can also pursue social and psychological aims. Some agents of fake news, such as individuals, news organizations, official, or nonofficial actors aspire to obtain a big audience and supporters, for that reason they disseminate fake news. Others apply fake news in order to become famous and prestigious.

It is interesting that freedom of expression, information access are considered to be one of the crucial factors contributing to democracy. Currently, when media and especially new media play an important role in all the spheres of our life, we can contend that new form of democracy has emerged - media democracy. Thanks to the internet and social media, all the people are given the opportunity to create, impart and disseminate information, express their opinions on certain issues. It means that media grant people the opportunity to have a certain type of authority, which we can call mediacracy.

A range of fake news stories that have political content sometimes might seem to be accurate. However, when one carefully reads, notices that the article is at best misleading or at worst destructively incorrect. In spite of this, many people believe in fake news articles because they strengthen the convictions people had before. For instance, if some people thought falsely that US president Barack Obama was a Muslim, they would not cast doubt on a fake news article titled "NYC Muslim Terrorist Donated Thousands to Barack Obama's Campaigns." For other people, fake news stories may seem true just because they read it in their news feed or the person they trust, shared it.

A great deal of previous research into fake news has focused on the fact that conservative political parties are more inclined to create and disseminate fake news than liberal political parties. Conservatives are more beware of risks and threats that is why fake news, which usually contain confidential information, crimes, or other sensational information attract the attention of conservatives more than that of liberals (Miller 2019).

Special attention should be paid to the correlation between fake news and partisan media. Partisan media tend to represent the news in a way that fosters the formation of a particular political agenda. Some years ago partisan media could disseminate news only through TV and radio. Nowadays, with the advent of the internet, new forms of partisan media appeared in online platforms. The latter give much more opportunities to cover partisan news more than ever. In addition, new media platforms promote the dissemination of misinformation through automated, anonymous accounts targeting people already involved in a specific subject discussion. The evidence presented in this section suggests that partisan media is inclined to allow dissemination of false news and information (Vargo et al. 2018).

Although partisan media and fake news are strongly interrelated, there are some discrepancies between them. It is thought that partisan media works for a certain political power or an organization and has the goal to create or reinforce their positive image within society. Partisan media do not have the intention to cause harm to other actors, it is rather inclined to create favourable conditions for a certain political agenda sometimes using biased information.

As to fake news, its intention is quite different and it is not concentrated on a particular agenda. Agents of fake news, unlike partisan media do not have the aim of

enhancing any actor, they are in an attempt to gain pecuniary or sometimes nonpecuniary profit.

Another significant aspect of fake news relates to freedom of speech. A question arises whether dissemination of misinformation can be viewed as a right to freedom of expression or unlawful act that has to be punished.

Freedom of expression is aimed at searching for truth. It is about developing and contesting thoughts to achieve a greater level of comprehension and knowledge and make fewer mistakes. Although truth itself is relative and elusive, the method resulting in it is a goal itself and must be followed.

In its case law, European Court of Human Rights emphasizes that all the people including bloggers, investigative journalists, scholars, civil society organizations, and their members should have the opportunity to be engaged in public discussions. They are especially vital for journalists and news organizations as it is connected with their profession and capacity to impart information, thus fostering the formation of public opinion. They have the mission of spreading information and thoughts about the issues that are within the interests of the society. Journalists, news organizations, and an increasing number of other actors can also function as public gatekeepers by shedding light on information and revealing all the misdeeds and corruption by the authorities.

Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights is not restricted to correct information. It is not restricted to factual information as well. The article also includes views or value judgements. It is important to note that facts and views are not identical: the existence of facts can be proven, but views or value judgements are not susceptible of proof. Views or opinions are not to be proved because this requirement would breach the right to freedom of opinion.

Anyone who applies the right to freedom of speech, in any situation has certain obligations, which differ in various cases. Especially journalists and media should be careful while imparting information in order not to infringe other people's rights or reputation. Their activities should be in conformity with journalistic ethics and aimed at good faith. The latter is not about the responsibility to tell the truth. Even when reporters act in good faith, dissemination of false news may happen (McGonagle 2017, 208).

In summary, these results show that people have the right to create and impart information both in online and offline platforms only when they act in good faith and do not have any intention to cause harm or infringe other's rights or reputation.

In light of recent developments in media sphere, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the existence of misinformation and its different manifestations in political communication, journalism, and even in our routine life. Both traditional and new media are filled with false information so much that sometimes many people prefer not to face the truth that is written in media but call it fake news. It is an irrefutable fact that nowadays fake news stories are quite widespread, but at the same time there are many cases when political actors attempting to avoid accountability or transparency, claim that all statements about them are fabricated or fake. It is important to note that facts cannot become less accurate because a certain person denies its existence or simply does not like it.

Many researchers put emphasis on the power of fake news and its capacity to influence political life. They state that as a result of fake news some candidates can get

more votes during the elections, some political forces can lose their political power, even revolutions can happen.

However, some authors think that it is uncertain how much it matters. Although the majority of people believe in misinformation, we cannot know for sure if this influences their voting behavior.

New generation should be careful not the repeat the mistakes of the past and overestimate the capacity of media of saving democracy. For example, in Germany free media did not have the ability to prevent the establishment of Nazi Party. American commentator Walter Lippmann thought that media cannot unilaterally rescue or destroy democracy. Nevertheless, one survey showed that the journalists and not the politicians decide which issues should be included and discussed in political agenda. In fact, media form the elusive force, which is called public opinion (Tworek 2017, 8-9).

It is thought that the relations between media and government mainly depend on the democratization level of the states. The states that are democratic, media platforms are less supervised by the governments, but in the countries that have authoritarian regime, both traditional and new media face some restrictions and obstacles in their activities, especially when trying to criticize the authorities.

According to McNair, some countries, for example Russia tries to serve social media and internet to its own state interests. In information warfare social media is an important instrument. Some countries, for example Turkey has tried by presidential fiat to remove media outlets off the map. China has set up its own alternatives that are carefully monitored by the state. Some countries including Germany have threatened huge penalties unless Facebook removes offensive posts within a day. Threats or problems of the social media primarily depend on a certain state (2018, 82).

It has previously been observed that many authorities around the globe are in an attempt to manipulate information, thus threatening the role of the internet as a platform for exercising right to freedom of speech and expression. Dissemination of false information and online manipulation have a huge impact especially during the elections. Fake news and information confuse citizens to elect their leaders.

Turning now to the experimental evidence on how to combat fake news, it is of key importance to represent the stance of UNESCO on this issue. The concept of "Media and Information Literacy" is introduced by UNESCO to highlight the interrelationship between information competencies and media competencies. These include education on human rights, particularly the right to freedom of expression, as a right to search, obtain, and impart information or opinion, news literacy, advertising literacy, computer literacy and so on (Posetti et al. 2018, 70).

It is a widely held view that media literacy is very important in the process of struggling against fake news. Nowadays, when every and each person can be an information producer, the volume of information is huge, and it is very difficult to understand which source of information can provide genuine information. So, media literacy teaches information consumers how to make use of the online sources and minimize the possibility of being deceived.

Countering fake news can be through legislative and nonlegislative means. Legislations of some countries hold technology companies responsible for imparting false information, calling for the quicker removal of the content that is not based on

reality. They threaten with heavy penalties and even imprisonment for the dissemination of fake news. For instance, the German Network Enforcement Act imposes penalties up to 50 Euros on social media companies if they do not agree to remove the content that is obviously illegal within 24 hours of after being warned.

Technology companies, in their turn, make efforts to struggle against fake news. For instance, Facebook removes fake accounts and promised to add more than 1000 individuals to its worldwide ad review teams to examine political ad purchases.

In some legislations not only technology companies, but also individuals are held accountable for spreading disinformation. For example, in the Philippines the Senate bill suggests fining individuals from 1950 dollars up to 97,587 dollars for creating and imparting fake information or from one to five years of imprisonment. The punishment is much stricter when the offender is a public figure. In this case the period of imprisonment and the amount of fine is doubled.

In some countries nonlegislative means, including fact-checking and counter fake news websites are used to combat fake news. For instance, Malaysia established a website for data verification.

Media literacy and critical thinking are also amongst nonlegislative measures of combating fake news. Canada, Italy, and Taiwan introduced school curriculum to teach students how to differentiate correct and incorrect information (Haciyakupoglu et al. 2018, 5-12).

Some specialists think that the struggle against fake news can be successful only in the case when state regulators and government will be engaged in this struggle. Although in some countries there are special laws or regulations that restrict the dissemination of disinformation, we can hardly be confident that these restrictions will wholly tackle the issue. The problem is that in some cases political actors or state regulators are creators and disseminators of the information that has false content. Furthermore, if the information both in online and offline platforms is controlled by state institutions, there will be a big question mark over people's right to freedom of expression as it will lead to political censorship (McNair 2018, 81).

The results of this research support the idea that new media have become an important element fostering democracy. Social media are the platform, where direct democracy can be applied. Nevertheless, the dissemination of fake news articles proves that some new struggle should be initiated to prevent the transformation of mediacracy to so-called fakeocracy.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study has shown that social media and civic journalism have influenced upon the form of life of modern societies. Due to social networking sites, communication opportunities for people have become quite big and diverse. Thanks to new technologies and social sites, each person can become a civic or citizen journalist and exercise his or her right of creating, imparting, and receiving information. This means that social media are the platform where people can exercise their right to freedom of expression. But at

the same time, exploiting the aforementioned right can lead to the dissemination of dangerous phenomena, such as fake news and hate speech.

The article outlines some specific conclusions as follows:

1. Civic journalism gives an opportunity to draw attention to the issues that would never be discussed in traditional media. It promotes public debates, consequently, contributes to the formation of public opinion. It is a modern means for people to directly communicate with different political actors and present their interests, complaints, or demands.

2. Another important finding was that civic journalism gives a great opportunity to citizens for self-organization and self-regulation, organize civic disobedience, and implement revolutions. Hence, civic journalism is one of the important factors fostering the development of civic society and democracy.

3. The current study found that on the one hand, citizen journalism gives a great opportunity to the public to express their ideas, stories, opinions, in a word, exercise their right to freedom of expression. On the other hand, too much freedom of speech in social media may lead to human rights violations.

4. Social media and civic journalism are strongly interrelated. Social media are the platform due to which civic journalism is applied. The content of social media can be different, and its goals are not always justified. Whereas, civic journalism pursues goals that contribute to public good.

5. The research has also shown that intention is the most important element in differentiating fake news from the news or information that may contain inaccuracy. The dissemination of fake news can have pecuniary, nonpecuniary, social, and psychological aims.

6. The most effective mechanism for struggling against fake news and hate speech are education and media literacy. Controlling all the information that is online, is against democratic values, that is why the best solution to cope with fake news and hate speech is to educate citizens.

7. Social networking sites make the activities of political actors, parties, and institutions more transparent, thus making political powers responsible for and accountable for their activities before the citizens. Furthermore, the majority of politicians can be considered to be civic journalists whose publications serve as a source of information for traditional media.

It has been reported that civic journalism and its significance implicate a formation of a new type of democracy, that is networking democracy. The reason for the existence and development of networking democracy is that nowadays social media are the very platforms where citizens freely express their opinions, organize mass events, and influence political decisions. It is thought that citizens apply their power through social media and civic journalism.

The article attempted to illustrate some issues regarding social media, nonetheless, there are still many unanswered questions about the positive and negative influences of it. This research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. It would be interesting to assess the effects of civic journalism and social media during the electoral campaigns in the countries where online campaigns are more popular than offline ones.

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