ACCESS, LOYALTY, AND TRUST: 
CHANGING AUDIENCES AND MEDIA 
LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY LITHUANIA

Aukšė BALČYTIENĖ
a.balcytiene@pmdf.vdu.lt
Professor, PhD
Department of Public Communications
Vytautas Magnus University
Kaunas, Lithuania

Aušra VINCIŪNIENĖ
a.vinciuniene@pmdf.vdu.lt
Lecturer and Researcher, PhD
Department of Public Communications
Vytautas Magnus University
Kaunas, Lithuania

Lina AUŠKALNIE NĖ
lauškalniene@pmdf.vdu.lt
PhD Candidate
Department of Public Communications
Vytautas Magnus University
Kaunas, Lithuania

Access, loyalty, and trust: Changing audiences and media life in contemporary Lithuania
ABSTRACT: This paper gives an account on how people in Lithuania access news and how they engage in media life. By taking cultural point of view this paper shows how these findings could be interpreted in the context of broader societal changes that also have direct impact on media professional practices (such as the rise of neoliberal reasoning inspired strategies, changes in journalistic profession, and the like). It identifies at least three factors that could be considered as most decisive determinants of media use in a consolidating democracy. The paper also registers other significant developments in media field in Lithuania, namely the rise of new communicative spaces that are being formed due to new technologies and social networks offering individualized participation, information consumption, and news access. Observed developments also have dramatic effects on how both journalists and audiences react to changing conditions in contemporary media and communications.

KEYWORDS: audience studies, media use, journalism culture, professional journalism, fragmentation, Baltic states

INTRODUCTION

Our contemporary surrounding realities are much more diverse and complex than imagined only a decade ago. We indeed live in times that are complex, uncertain, and troubled. In the words of world-renown sociologist and thinker Zygmunt Bauman, our times are undeniably ‘liquid’ – these are the times not only of rapid changes and transformations, but also of losses, hesitations, disappointments, and devaluations (Bauman, 2000). These are also the times of various fears – the times of facing the unknown, unidentified, and strange.

The fields of journalism and media are not excluded from these many challenges. It is not only mere technological diffusion or technological determinism related issues, such as the rise of pluralist and participatory journalism, which challenge journalistic professions in all countries around the world (and not only in small markets of the CEE). Likewise, it is not only economic and financial issues that frustrate media life in many established, consolidating, and transition democracies. It appears the biggest challenges today are indeed happening in the social and cultural spheres of human activities – particularly, in the ways people identify, confront, and meet their informational needs; also in the ways they communicate, engage, and react to the changes in their closest surrounding political or economic realities. Thus it could be said that the biggest transformation today is happening within the heads of the people. It is difficult to foretell whether this is because of the financial and economic crisis or technological diffusion and diversification, or if those several factors in com-
bination have speeded media de-massification and fragmentation and, consequently, social polarization. One thing is clear – the mainstream mass media is losing not only its previously dominant role and centrality in contemporary societies, but it is also losing its public trust.

As registered in recent media use statistics, the public trust in media in Lithuania has dropped to its lowest position in the last decade. Only about one third of the population expresses trust in media. Although signalling serious transformations in media life in general, this result can be interpreted as both – an outcome and a chance. It is an outcome in terms of audience reaction to the strategies observed in the mainstream media and its obvious shift towards neoliberal capitalism inspired strategies towards entertainment oriented, sensations saturated production. At the same time it is also a result signalling modifications in audience preferences (and not only among young users) towards less institutionalized, less formalized, less mainstream oriented news consumption. As will be discussed in this paper, the latter tendency is exceptionally interesting since it has an obvious and dramatic effect on further transformation of the Lithuanian media landscape, and possibly on the emergence of a completely new type of communications and media culture. All things considered, all these trends and developments (shifts in audience preferences and media development trends) can be seen as signalling the emergence of something new, something different, something we are only now acquiring -- a feeling we are coming to an understanding to which we are able to give words and shape.

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In times of change and uncertainty it is becoming more and more difficult to make predictions about a world in which a multitude of simultaneous processes is at play, including rapid globalization, financial instability, technological diffusion, and the struggle and even death of ideals. It is exactly due to this multiplicity of factors and processes that existing empirical instruments and social theories are becoming powerless and cannot explain what is happening around us.

Only in the past few years has the Lithuanian media landscape been challenged to a surprising degree. The economic recession, with a decline in advertising...
revenues, tax changes and increasing competition, has significantly affected media operations in all countries of the Baltic region (Rožukalne, 2012b). In Lithuania, the advertising market shrunk to dramatic levels (by 39.2% in 2009), thus, all media companies reassessed their business plans, changed programming, recalculated salaries, and postponed investments. In 2009, the advertising revenues were almost 50% less in newspapers and magazine publishing when compared to 2008; the TV sector had to face 37% less income from advertising, while the drop in Internet advertising revenues was 32%. The economic recession has especially severely hit the budget of the public service broadcaster (the LRT, the Lithuanian Radio and Television)² and the drastic cuts in programming and changes in content followed: broadcasting time on television and radio was reduced to critical levels, specialized content programs were terminated, and radio programs in the English language were cancelled. Another observation is related to social pressures on journalistic professionalism associated with increasing media competition and growing media convergence.

At the same time, in spite of these many challenges and drawbacks, a significant number of media companies in Lithuania, especially those operating in alternative and niche markets, have used this moment of crisis for quality improvement, change, diversification, and renewal³. Today’s communications field in Lithuania is indeed booming – it is saturated with new channels, news sources, access opportunities, and contributors hardly imagined only a few years ago. For audiences, there is not just one news media or source of inspiration available. There are no longer just one or, at best, a few attitudes or dominating opinions. With new communication channels and online news sources there are millions of these. Interactive technological developments, supported with economic models of small-scale online funding, and the development of online media and blogosphere are actually leading to the formation of completely new audience groups, new social movements, and new virtual formations. These groups are not massive – they are niche-issue oriented; they function as de-territorialized, yet ideologically shaped, groups of followers and supporters. Likewise, the media professionals, too, are facing new types of partnerships emerging on the basis of an interactive supply of audience-generated news and content developed and maintained by groups of online media enthusiasts⁴.

Consequently, a number of critical questions need to be asked here: What are these emerging news access practices indicating? What is journalism for in such rapidly changing social conditions? Where can major guidelines for journalistic professionalism be found in a society polarized, fragmented, and dominated by interest-shaped consumer communities?

² In 2009, the budget allocations for LRT were 43,016.0 thousand Litas (19% less than in 2008, 53,047.9 thousand), and advertising revenue was 14,420.5 thousand Litas (51% less than in 2008, 29,445.3 thousand).

³ A number of niche magazines were established which indeed diversified the market of magazines ranging from popular and celebrity magazines, to specialized interest and political and economic news analysis monthlies (“The National Geographic”, “GEO”, “IQ: The Economist”); also, a number of alternatives emerged online – all of them signalling the arrival of new standards of (participatory, pluralist) journalism.

⁴ Kasvykstakaune.lt is perhaps the best example of pluralist and participatory journalism.
As it often happens with change when people are confronted with something (new social forms and social relations) to which they cannot yet assign a well-developed understanding, a shape, a metaphor, or a simple keyword, a bottom-up approach is proposed as offering an insightful research experience. Likewise, the cultural perspective could become a valid view that guides academic inquiries and provides an informed account.

Undeniably, culture has a deep influence on how we live, and how we understand and perceive the world that surrounds us. The ways in which we create order out of our closest everyday surroundings, the ways that we make sense or give meaning to our lives, the way we make sense of the myriad of interactions we experience – all these practices are dependent on the cultural legacy – traditions, imaginaries, views and values – we have inherited (Chabal and Daloz, 2006: 37). By seeking to give explanations, such an approach enters the realm of the interpretation of meanings. Instead of only registering what is observed, it seeks to see the event from the viewpoint of the ‘other’. Subsequently, this approach shares the view that in aiming to understand others it is crucial to understand how they understand themselves. Such an approach understands culture as an environment, a constantly evolving setting within which human behaviour follows a particular number of political and ideological courses.

Briefly, culture is not an additional dimension to politics or media that requires particular attention. Culture is the key component of social life. It is the matrix within which we understand how political and all other actions take place. Following the words of cultural view supporters in media analysis (Carey, 1989; Chabal and Daloz, 2006; Mancini, 2008), to understand how a cultural system of meanings shape media use and social life changes, analysts must immerse deeply in a particular cultural milieu; they must apply a bottom-up approach; they must collect and analyze context-specific data. Such an approach in attempts to understand social relations follows an approach that culture and identity are not mechanical determinants of people’s behaviour but are ways in which people connect to others and come to share understandings and assumptions about motives and actions. For the purpose of understanding how political, economic, or social and media realities are functioning, induction is the best strategy for developing contextually meaningful explanations rooted in empirical observations. To do this effectively, it is needed to master locally shared meanings rather than impose frameworks from other cultural settings.

This paper, therefore, aims at several goals. It describes and interprets the data obtained from a representative audience survey on media use; it also registers
all observations in terms of how frequently and with what media channels people access news, what media channels they trust and use for different needs, and what media types they choose to create their media day. It draws conclusions paying particular attention to context shaped (political, economic) characteristics, historical traditions and popular social imaginaries, and discusses these results from a culturally focused perspective.

**AUDIENCE STUDIES AND THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

Social inclusion, media activism, mediated connectivity, networked citizenship, and media-inspired engagement have become attractive definitions in academic media and audience relationships analysis discourse. This is a valid shift in researcher interests since, as discussed above, all these challenges of the age of late modernity, second modernity, re-modernity, or liquid modernity (Beck, 1997; Bauman, 1999; Bauman 2000; Giddens, 1991) are, at best, reflected in the patterns of media use. But studying audiences is a challenge of its own kind. As Mark Deuze puts it, “networked individualist and personalized information space that digital natives have created for themselves and which constitutes their everyday reality influences work, play, learning and interacting by unsettling, liquefying all boundaries” (Deuze, 2011: 143). Media is so immersed in everyday realities of modern individuals that it exceeds and goes far beyond usual news consumption patterns; it exceeds channels of traditional mass media and introduces a variety of alternative, more specialized online media sources.

There are many classical theories available on how audiences respond to and interact with the media (a good overview of passive and active audiences is provided in Carpentier, 2011); there is also a full field of academic research on audience studies in Europe (for the most recent overview see, for example, Bilandzic et al., 2011). However, these studies do not present a complete picture on contemporary changes – they do not disclose a full view about particularities and qualities of audience individualized access and personified contact with information; they do not address issues of, specifically, what meanings people construct of their engagement with and participation in media-constructed and maintained realities. For that reason, the purpose of this empirical study was not only to depict a general picture of media use in Lithuania, but also to explore deeper meanings of its use – to assess perceptions of different audience groups on media performance and quality, disclose means and ways of intentional news consumption and the audience’s involvement in online content creation.
Discussion in this paper moves around the results obtained from the Representative National Public Opinion Survey on Media Use, conducted in Lithuania (N=1023) in October 2011. Respondents aged 12–75+ were selected randomly, datasets covering all regions of Lithuania. The survey was outsourced and conducted by trained interviewers of the public opinion research company RAIT, using a face-to-face interview method. Probability sampling was used with a margin of sampling error for the complete data set of ±3.1%. The interviewed sample was weighted in relation to the census of Lithuania and balanced to match general socio-demographic parameters for age, gender, education, income and type of community.

A multiple-choice questionnaire (containing 100 questions) was specifically designed to draw the parallels between mediated environment and participatory activities of media audiences within this environment. This discussion is focused on two significant research questions, namely (1) analysis of media consumption patterns and routines, and (2) media social connectivity assessments such as practices of new media use and people's perceptions of the Internet and social media.

**NEWS CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AND ROUTINES**

Despite the absence of a consistent academic audience research tradition, available data on media use in Lithuania suggests that social connectedness and information consumption has become among those central aspects of everyday life in the country. As other studies also disclose (Balčytienė, 2011), there is a wide selection of media channels in Lithuania; moreover – media seems to be open for audience inputs and comments; it is affordable and accessible. On the other hand, availability of independent media and sources of interpreting information is restricted. Furthermore, all this suggests a strong impression of heterogeneity of media structures, qualities of media performance, and, accordingly, media access by different audience groups. The media field in Lithuania seems to be dispersed and polarized, where different sectors operate under their own logic – mainstream media operate under the logic of power-establishment (it fights over resource-allocations and thus is strongly commercialized); whereas alternative and niche media enter this field with their own aim of gaining visibility and establishing adequate power by fulfilling the needs and expectations of underrepresented (niche) audience groups.

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5 The survey was conducted as a part of the research project "Journalism in Lithuania: Context and Culture" (MIP012/2011) funded by the Research Council of Lithuania.

6 TNS Gallup regularly produces data about media use in Lithuania.
Generally, the amount of daily time spent with information has increased in all age groups. On average, Lithuanians spend 3.5 hour per day watching TV and 91% of them are listening to radio for at least 15 minutes every day (TNS Annual Review of Media Surveys, 2011). Our survey also demonstrates the rising popularity of the Internet for daily news searches: Internet media is used by 58.6% of citizens and more than half of them go online 6-7 days a week (that constitutes 65.5% of all Internet users) and nearly as many of them (47.8%) are spending at least several hours online a day.

One of the most interesting observations identified in this research study is linked with features that differentiate media access and use. The ‘age’ gradually has become the main distinguishing factor in media use while other socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, education, income, and so forth are turning out to be of much less importance. Although some minor influences on news consumption were identified, these variables were not the strongest causes distinguishing media use.

Similar observations were registered in other audience studies performed by Baltic scholars (Vihalem, 2008; Briksiš and Zelče, 2008). This directs our attention to media divides (and not only digital divides) among different groups of people. Generational divides between audience groups is observed not only in their diverse media choices (for instance, what channels are preferred for the daily use of news and information), but is also reflected in other patterns of media use, such as frequency and time of the day when media is accessed, trust in information sources, and individual reasons and specific needs for certain types of information. This proves that society in Lithuania is becoming more disintegrated and dispersed according to different interests, media consumption habits and routines.

The representative survey on media use in Lithuania reveals some interesting tendencies and, at the same time, controversial findings. Although there is clear evidence of media landscape diversification in Lithuania (from the variety of different media titles and alternative channels regularly followed by individual users), traditional broadcast media – TV and radio – still have very strong positions and remain the most popular news media types among all age groups. When asked “What information channels did you access yesterday for daily news?”, 93.9% of all survey respondents named TV and more than two thirds (61.4%) also mentioned radio (see Figure 1). Both radio and TV are almost equally important for all age groups (especially TV); although, radio as a news channel is less favoured by younger people between ages 15-24 (49.7% of this
group of the respondents claim to listen to radio daily) (see Figure 2). A similarly homogenous tendency among different age groups is also observed in magazine readership. Although being the least popular media type (24% read magazines daily), magazines are also almost equally popular as a daily news source among young as well as senior audiences. As Figure 3 demonstrates, a clear generational divide dissolves in magazine readership as well as TV news consumption – the difference between two groups of audiences, namely aged 12-42 and 43+, varies only from 4% to 8% respectively.


**Respondents of the survey were asked: “What information channels have you accessed yesterday for daily news?”.

***% of all survey respondents (N=1023).
At the same time, the research study proves that a large variation within magazine titles (over 80) are preferred by separate individuals (some of them read only by 1-2 respondents of the survey). As in the case of TV, there is a clear domination of several leading TV channels accessed almost in equal terms by all different audience segments.

Individual choices and preferences of particular media outlets reveal a clear distinction between so called ‘mainstream’ media, accessed by the majority of people, and other news sources, targeted at much smaller audiences – usually local and regional channels and newspapers (in the case of TV, radio and print press) or more specialized interests, such as hobbies and profession-oriented magazines and online news portals. Among the three most popular media outlets mentioned by survey respondents there were 20 TV and 45 radio stations, 95 newspapers, 84 magazine titles and 46 online news portals and websites. In all types of media, several leading channels/outlets were mentioned by more than 5% of survey respondents, among them: 5 TV channels (TV3 – 90.2%, LNK – 86.3%, LTV – 57.7%, BTV – 9.7% and Lietu vos Ryto TV – 7.4%), 5 radio stations (Lietuvos Radijas – 28.5%, M-1 – 26.3%, Lietus – 20.1%, Pūkas – 15.6%, Radiocentras – 5.9%), 5 newspapers (Lietuv os Rytas – 38.7%, Vakaro Žinios – 14.7%, Respublika – 8.4%, 15 Minučių – 7.9%, Kauno Diena – 5.8%) and 3 magazines (Žmonės – 32.2%, Ji – 8.3%, Savaitė – 5.3%), 4 different online portals, social media channels and websites (Delfi.lt – 31.7%, Facebook – 21.5%, Google – 10.9%, Lrytas.lt – 5.1%).
Only half of the survey respondents (53%) follow media in foreign languages, teenagers and students between 15-24 being the most active ones (65.9% of them follow at least one or several foreign media channels/outlets on a regular basis) while senior audiences aged 65-74 and 75+ appear to be the least interested in foreign language programs (30.8% and 22% respectively) (see Figure 7). Research data also discloses that the individual choices of mainly senior audiences are dominated by Russian media channels, among which are the most popular newspapers Express Nedelia and Obzor, radio stations Ruskoje Radio Baltija and Radio Svoboda, TV channels RTR Planeta and Perevyj Baltijskij Kanal. That is not the case, though, in online and social media. Facebook, Google and YouTube were absolute leaders among younger audiences (between 12-35), who also prefer TV channels in English (MTV, Eurosport, BBC, CNN News, Discovery, Travel, etc.). In fact, news consumption in foreign media probably depends most on having the knowledge and skills of particular foreign languages. It appears that a majority of Lithuanian citizens can speak and understand Russian (70.9%) while less than a third English (33.2%), Polish (12.6%) or German (8.1%). Here a clear distinction among different generations is also evident: Russian is mostly spoken and used by people of age 43+ (84.6% in comparison to 57.5% of people 14-42) while English is the mostly preferred foreign language by audiences between 14-42 (57.3% in comparison to 8.9% of people 43+).

*Figure 4. Use of foreign media channels for news consumption among different age groups.*


**Respondents of the survey were asked: “Do you follow news in foreign media channels (in TV or Internet) at all: every day, 3-4 days a week, 1-2 days a week or at least several times a month?”.

***% of all survey respondents in different age groups.
MEDIA AND YOUNG PEOPLE

As data shows, young media users fancy online news portals, forums, and blogs. The Internet is their main source for daily news (following TV): 82,1% of 12-14 year-olds, 87% of 15-24 year-olds and 73,8% of 25-34 year-olds are regularly browsing the Internet for informational purposes (see Figure 2). Social media is also important for them (percentage of user ranges accordingly – 64,1%, 74% and 41,3%). For younger audiences, the Internet is also the most popular medium to access news and information throughout the whole day. That is particularly interesting when compared to TV use that reveals itself to be the traditional ‘evening’ media in all age groups – TV consumption in the evening ranges from 58,2% among 65-74 year-olds to 94,9% among teenagers of 12-15 years old (see Figure 5). In fact, citizens of Lithuania between the ages of 12-35 are ‘multiple’ media users – namely, 41% of them browse the Internet and watch TV in the evenings (even though it is hard to find out whether they do both at the same time).

This study once again confirms results of some recent audience studies performed in other countries that, despite the growing popularity of new media platforms among younger generation of media users, it does not eliminate the use of more traditional channels, especially television, among them (Van Cauwenberge et al., 2010; Rožukalne, 2012a). One can assume that in Lithuania, extensive consumption of TV and online (social) media among youngsters may also be driven by the same motives as everywhere else – to escape from daily routine and be entertained. Furthermore, as demonstrated elsewhere, for young people who are juggling multiple media sources across different platforms, “news is not an end in itself but a means for experiencing the world around them: i.e. monitoring their environment, giving meaning to their lives, identifying personal values for truth, getting a sense of belonging, for conversation and inspiration” (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2010, p. 336-337).


**Respondents of the survey were asked: “What is your typical ‘media day’, in other words, which information channels do you usually use in the morning (till noon), daytime (till 5 pm), evenings (from 5 pm) and which do you follow pretty much the whole day?”.

***% of all survey respondents (N=1023).
Additionally, especially with younger audiences, we can see a clear link between keeping up-to-date with current events and being able to participate in conversations with family, friends, and colleagues. This social ingredient forms a noticeable part of the personal news gathering process. Many survey participants ranked ‘discussion with family, friends, and colleagues’ as a top source for news and information (74,1% of all respondents), positioning it higher than radio, newspapers, magazines, Internet and social media (see Figure 1). As this empirical study reveals, the importance of the social connections as disseminator of news and information is yet again more significant for younger people of 14-42 (81% of respondents in this age group claim that) than the senior audience of 43+ (67%) (see Figure 3). It is also particularly interesting in connection to the high numbers of younger audiences using online media for the same networking purposes (Internet is accessed for daily news by 73% and social media by 48% of people between 14-42).

TRUST IN MEDIA

The notion of media credibility is linked to a more general concept of trust as expressed by media users. As widely discussed, in different periods of post-communist transformations, media in Baltic countries has always dominated public life (Balčytienė, 2012). So, there is enough evidence to assume that twenty years of increasing commercialization and orientation towards consumerism and materialistic values has affected not only news consumption habits but also resulted in distrust in mass media (as well as other public institutions).

According to the study results, trust in all media channels is considerably low among Lithuanian users. It is far below 50% in all media types, the most trusted media being radio (47,5% of all respondents stated that) and TV (45,6%) (see Figure 6). Fewer people of all age groups trust print (34,7% - dailies and newspapers and 30,1% - magazines) and online media (internet news portals – 23,9%, social media – 14,7% and 6,9% - blogs). Here again, a clear generational gap is evident when we look at which type of media is trusted more – broadcast, print or online (see Figure 7). People of age 35-75+ consider TV, radio, traditional dailies and regional as well as local newspapers as more reliable information sources. The Internet is mostly trusted by the youngsters – 46,2% trust Internet media in the age group of 12-14, 46,3% of 15-24, and 36,9 – 25-34. It is also important to note that in the age group of 25-34, online media is trusted more than any other traditional media channel (TV, radio, newspapers or magazines). Trust in different media channels is also indirectly revealed through the actions people claimed they would take in unusual or critical situations. When asked which media chan-
nel they would use in a critical moment for the society (nature disasters, terrorism attack, etc.) most of the survey respondents chose national TV (71%) or radio (41.5%); others (mostly youngsters) preferred online media (26.7%) or decided to turn to their family members, relatives and friends for information (46.5%).

![Trust in different media types](image)

*Representative National Public Opinion Survey on Media Use, October 2011, Lithuania, N=1023.*  
**Respondents of the survey were asked: "Do you agree or disagree that this type of media is trustworthy".**  
***% of all survey respondents.

More general public assessments of media performance were also assessed in this study. Individual assessment of various media characteristics on the scale of opposing variations (biased-objective, unreliable-reliable, boring-interesting, tabloid-serious, unethical-ethical, corrupt-uncorrupt, poor-high quality, scandalous-decent, irresponsible-responsible, nondemocratic-democratic, negative-positive, passive-involving) was measured. As data shows, most media users nearly unanimously selected the middle value, which means it was difficult for them to decide which characteristics are inherent to Lithuanian media in general (see Figure 8). Nonetheless, people recognize certain performance characteristics as dominant: on the one hand, media is described as scandalous, tabloid, corrupt, and biased; whereas it also is interesting, involving, producing high quality, and democratic. This leads to controversy – on the one side, such findings can come from different personal experiences of individual media users, i.e. what particular news programs they watch, newspapers they read, or online sites they visit more often; or, similarly, it depicts key characteristics of the Lithuanian media landscape still dominated by a 'politically engaged' and strong mainstream media, and instrumentalized journalism for which elements of tabloidization, clientelism, and corruption are quite significant (Balčytienė, 2010; Balčytienė, 2011).
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Figure 7.
Trust in media among different age groups.

Figure 8.
Attitudes towards the media.

**Respondents of the survey were asked: “How trustworthy do you personally find the information provided by these different types of media in Lithuania?” (all answers “absolutely trustworthy” and “trustworthy” were counted).
***% of all survey respondents in different age groups.

**The five-point Likert scale was used to evaluate attitudes of individual media users in Lithuania. For the convenience of data analysis, all the answers showing the respondents’ opinion (agreement/disagreement) with different antagonistic media characteristics were then later reduced to three positions: 1 – totally agree, agree, 2 – uncertain, 3 – disagree, totally disagree.
***Number of answers of individual respondents.
Taking into account the tendencies of change in the public trust in media and general public and social apoliticism, it is not surprising that people in Lithuania tend to rely mostly on themselves and nobody else when forming attitudes on political and public affairs. More than half of the survey respondents stated they form their opinions independently (66.2%). But again, some differences can be observed both with regard to age differences and social engagement (associational participation). Quite even numbers of people stated they form their own opinion (66% compared to 66.2% of not active and not involved) and listen to their family members’ opinions (29.9% compared to 28.1%) (see Figure 9). However, more individuals in the first group said they rely on experts in the media (35.5% compared to 23%) or friends (26.4% compared to 15.7%) and colleagues (13.2% compared to 5.7%). It seems that more civically active individuals are those who tend to look for more views and opinions then relying only on personal knowledge. In this case, a person’s social network plays a significant role influencing media perceptions as well. Still, another interesting observation is that with age people become more critical towards the attitudes of others and begin to trust their own expertise more (see Figure 10).


**Respondents of the survey were asked: “Whose opinion do you mostly rely on when forming your own attitudes on politics/public affairs?”.

***% of respondents in each of two groups: active and involved in civic organizations, associations, etc. (N=318) and not active and not involved in any civic organizations, associations, etc. (N=705).
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**Respondents of the survey were asked: “Whose opinion do you mostly rely on when forming your own attitudes on politics and public affairs?”. Here three groups of sources of opinion formation were compiled: CLOSE circle (family, friends, and colleagues), EXPERTS (experts in the media, journalists, and politicians), and Form my OWN opinions.
***% of all survey respondents in different age groups.

In general, it appears that low associational participation and distrust in media are among the biggest drawbacks and challenges in contemporary Lithuania. However, as it was already shown and will be demonstrated more extensively further, audiences of a younger age follow their own preferences online, and niche and specialized agendas.

MEDIA RITUALS

The survey has demonstrated quite convincingly that a large segment of the population in Lithuania is getting news and information from many media sources, not just one or two. Clearly, being well informed requires seeking out multiple sources across different media formats (conventional and online) and judging between local/national and foreign news sources, as well as making distinctions between mainstream and specialized/alternative channels. For others, as will be shown further, the ritual of using multiple sources and formats can also be a matter of convenience – online sources, for example are more easily accessible throughout the day, whereas newspapers are usually read and radio is listened to in the morning, TV is more accessible at night.

The idea of ritualized news access requires further, more focused and informed analysis. This study, nevertheless, confirms some known tendencies, and it also indicates new developments: for example, online news reading takes place throughout the day, and morning is the most common time to consume news.

Figure 10. Sources of opinion formation on politics and public affairs among different age groups.
from newspapers (21% of survey respondents do that) and radio (by 21%) (see Figure 5). Many respondents also confirmed they use different types of media and check different sources of news throughout the day, and among all media channels radio is the most popular (it is used by 21.6% of all respondents). The ones who reported consuming information in the evenings were usually checking news on TV (73.7%) and browsing the Internet (31.2% in comparison to 3.7% of respondents who check news online mostly in the mornings and 8.6% during daytime). People aged 45-75+ remain the most loyal readers of dailies and print newspapers (among age group 45-54 there are 62.8% of those and among 75 and more – 62.2%) (see Figure 2); and they are also those who listen to morning radio news broadcasts (accordingly – 26.4% and 28%). A much smaller group of younger people in Lithuania are daily newspaper readers, teenagers between age 12-14 being the most ignorant ones (63.7% of respondents this age stated that they do not read dailies and print newspapers at all).

Another important finding is that different types and channels of media serve different functions when it comes to the informational needs of news consumers. Clearly, people in Lithuania turn to TV mostly for crime news (77.4% of all respondents search for this type of information) and political affairs (72.3%) (see Figure 11). The same is applicable to print press (28.8% and 25.7% accordingly). Cultural affairs on TV are mostly viewed by senior audiences (e.g. 72% of people between 55-64). For sports news they rely on TV as well as go online - 82% of teenagers access sports online in both media types, and of youngsters (15-24), 63% watch sports on TV. Interest in celebrity news stands out in the case of magazines (20.8% of respondents look for this type of information). Meanwhile, activities online are more directed to the subjective, self-reflective actions – most active users of the Internet associate this medium mostly with leisure, hobbies and personal interests (30.1% of all respondents search for this type of information). However, when they look for news it is mostly specialized professional information (31.4%) or technology and science news (29%) that attracts their attention.

Still, the most active users of media (spending at least several hours a day) clearly turn to TV, Internet and social media more often for entertainment purposes than aiming to keep up to date with the current national and world news (e.g. 76.4% of active media users watch TV to spend their free time in comparison to 67.7% that consume news) (see Figure 12). It comes with no surprise that even in the news consumption private interest topics (crime news, ICT & science news, celebrity news, leisure, travelling and information about a particular country, and specialized/professional information) prevail over public interest topics (political affairs, cultural affairs and sports) in all media types, especially magazines and
online portals (e.g. 47.7% of survey respondents search for private interest topics online and 33.4% are interested in public affairs) (see Figure 13). Also, many participants of the survey expressed a strong desire to be more informed about matters of more private than public interest – social security and care (29.6% of all respondents lack more of this type of information), health and medicine (19.5%), family and household (18.6%), nature and environment (18.4%) and so forth.

** Respondents of the survey were asked: “What types of news do you follow or search for information in different types of media?”
***% of all survey respondents.
Overall, this research study provides evidence on the emerging shift towards a fragmented culture of daily news consumption that is characterized by personally selected information and individuals of different generations gaining control over their media day (what topics to choose, what channels to select, and what sources to rely on). Another important observation is that news needs change with age. The data collected suggests that younger participants are more interested in private topics and specialized, hobbies- and lifestyle-issue oriented information (followed mainly on TV and online), while senior users expressed more focused desires for political affairs and are clearly still highly influenced by old news consumption habits.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC LIFE

Internetization and technological diffusion can be considered as recent, distinguishing developments in Baltic communications markets. These developments could also be blamed for the changes in media use habits, especially of young users. Because of high Internet penetration and outstanding online media popularity, some unique tendencies of individualized media use as well as a rapidly evolving culture of more active involvement (through niche, alternative and mainly online media initiatives) can be witnessed.
Clearly, online engagement is a phenomenon of 'new generation users' (Dutton and Blank, 2011) who embrace the opportunities new technologies and social communication means are offering. Results from the survey convey that engaged audiences (usually younger media consumers) browse online portals, forums, blogs, and comment online more often than the rest of consumers (see Figure 14). Internet penetration in some age groups (12-14 and 15-24) nearly reaches 100% and online social networks are gaining power as well (see Figure 15). Young people and students between 15-24 are the most active Internet and media users – 81.4% of them use the Internet 6-7 days a week, more than half of them (55.9%) spending several hours a day browsing for daily news online; additionally, 74.6% connect to social media at least once a day and 45.8% do it even more often, spending a total of several hours a day in social networking sites.

**Diagram depicts percentages of all respondents who: 1) use Internet 6-7 days a week; 2) spend several hours a day on the Internet; 3) use social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, Klase.lt, Linkedin, etc); 4) connect to social media at least once a day; 5) connect to social media every day for several hours; 6) are active and engaged online (search for political news online on a regular basis, engage in online discussions, comment on issues, contact politicians, etc.); 7) read blogs in Lithuanian or other languages; 8) write a blog or have a personal website.
***% of all survey respondents (N=1023) and of those who use Internet (N=600).
Representative National Public Opinion Survey on Media Use, October 2011, Lithuania, N=1023.

**Diagram** depicts percentages of all respondents in different age groups who: 1) use Internet; 2) use social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, Klase.lt, LinkedIn, etc); 3) are active and engaged online (search for political news online on a regular basis, engage in online discussions, comment on issues, contact politicians, etc.); 4) read blogs in Lithuanian or other languages; 5) write a blog or have a personal website.

At the same time, the willingness to search for alternative, niche sources of information is extremely significant; the same goes for an audience's involvement in online content creation. Surprisingly, there is no direct connection between associational participation and blog readership; the majority of online content contributors are also not among those who are socially active and involved in civic organizations (see Figure 16). It becomes clear from the research data that main readers and writers of online blogs in Lithuania are people in their teenage years or devoted Internet users – i.e. 48.6% of young people between 15-24, 35% between 25-34, 25.5% between 35-44 and 23.1% between 12-14 search for alternative information and read blogs, both in Lithuanian and other languages; 23.1% of 12-14 year-olds and 16.9% of 15-24 year-olds, followed by smaller percentages of people in other age groups, write their own blogs or have a personal website (see Figure 15).
Reasons behind the user’s reliance on alternative media, i.e. blogs, are several: looking for new, original ideas (12% of all survey respondents stated that) or alternative opinions on various public matters (7,2%), but also searching for specialized information related to one’s profession (8,7%) or hobbies (5,7%) (see Figure 17). All in all, 74,3% of all blog readers turn to blogs for alternative information not available in mainstream media and 46,5% of them are searching for profession- and hobby-oriented information. Accordingly, people who write their own blogs or have a personal website do so because of personal and professional reasons.

**Figure 17.**
Personal motives of following various Internet blogs and creating content online.

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Access, loyalty, and trust: Changing audiences and media life in contemporary Lithuania
Evidently, the proliferation of media channels and converging communication technologies of networked character stimulate bottom-up projects providing the exchange of user-generated content. The Internet is associated with several key descriptors such as knowledge and information provision, grassroots initiatives, global virtual participation, or alternative communication. At the same time, less structured, more open and accessible online channels still lack the all-embracing character. These claims open new perspectives for discussion on how online media use by certain audience groups affects the general participation culture in the country and vice versa.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Economic and technological futures are indeed unclear and rapidly changing. Likewise, emerging media realities, journalistic professionalism requests and their missions, and audience preferences are also changing. As discussed in this paper, these shifts are taking place not only because of economic or technological changes (although many changes registered in media field are inspired by these), but also because of much broader changes in society. As registered in different studies, the public role and public mission of journalism is in decline, and journalism is moving towards more instrumentalized, clientelist production. At the same time, journalism is also changing to become more collaborative, more engaged, and less competitive. It is becoming more inclusive, less detached, less trained on the perspectives of only the powerful economic or political elites. Consequently, the sphere of legitimate discourse is expanding – it integrates new names, new perspectives, and grassroots voices and views. Audiences are also changing. They are becoming more selective in what they choose and require from media. Mainstream media is also changing – it is threatened with the rise of new alternatives, new niches, and specialized channels.

All in all, the above research study and discussion inspired by these findings discloses many things. Among those, the most significant observation is the identification of certain factors as having effects on media life and media use in Lithuania. Briefly, public encounters with news and information and new technologies are challenged by at least three tendencies affecting communications field: (1) technological diffusion and media de-massification; (2) the shift towards entertaining missions in conventional media; and (3) journalistic de-professionalization (see Figure 18).
Apparently, these tendencies are applicable not only for the developing markets of Baltic or CEE countries. The first of those tendencies – new technological developments towards social inclusiveness and individualized consumption – has indeed stimulated the rise of new online alternatives to mass media such as blogs, online meeting spaces, niche and specialized media or community web pages (Boyd-Barrett, 2007; Carpentier, 2011). The biggest value is that participation in these personalized, dynamic, parallel online spaces enables authentic experiences of users. They function as virtual spaces which help to consolidate common interests and values among their users. These networks also speed up developments of de-territorialized communities that have no real (institutionalized) memberships, but they develop around ideas (and ideologies)\(^7\).

Altogether, with clientelism becoming stronger in media, the general loss of audience interest in politics, and the loss of public trust in media, attention needs to be re-directed towards the question of how to ensure the quality public sphere and how to maintain participatory political culture in such a society?

The shifting role of media is also discussed in different studies. Only in recent years have a number of controversies surrounding international media tycoons who influenced and roughed up media business been reported.

All these developments (of media segmentation and its turn towards more instrumentalized production) also signal changes in the journalistic profession. As observed, de-professionalization of journalism has become a reality not
only in new democracies: the rise of ideological journalism is registered even in countries with long standing traditions of professional media (Hallin, 2009).

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Briefly, what we are discussing and observing here – emerging hybridities in media landscape and also in media use patterns – could even be used as a broader metaphor for some of the most important trends observed in contemporary societies. Increasing social polarization, the growth of pluralism and diversity, the decline of impartiality and objectivity in mainstream journalism, and the gradual loss of credibility and trust in mass media are becoming the new social and cultural constructs of the contemporary world.

As demonstrated in this paper, cultural perspective seems to be crucial in the understanding of structural and procedural characteristics and cultural qualities of media use in changing societies. In many ways, it could be said that Lithuania (and other CEE countries) can be interpreted and understood as laboratories of modern life. Having experienced multiple transformations in the past, and, today, secularization of their public spheres along with a value revival in parallel and alternative spaces, the countries of Central and East Europe could be seen as laboratories where extreme complexities of modern life are tested.

It is a truism that globalization, coupled with individualization and social fragmentation, have created a society dispersed along the lines of personified interests, consumer needs, or fears. Many thinkers have already warned that all developments towards more globalized, individual needs-centered, and more narcissistic social forms and arrangements, give rise to a new type of society that is polarized and fragmented; that is chained and locked into its own webs of interests and competing ideologies; that has very little sense of community and little understanding of the meaning of it. The questions of who will become the new agents of change in such a society, and whether professional journalism and professional media will re-design and re-invent their missions and roles also for the new liquid times remain to be asked.
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