

Slovakia - Media Landscape

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Overview

The main source (63 percent) of information about national political issues for Slovak citizens is television broadcast. The second most relevant source of information is the Internet. As many as 23 percent of respondents considered the Internet as

their primary source of information about national political issues in late 2015 (Eurobarometer 84, p.9). Considering newspaper-centric and television-centric media systems, Slovakia belongs to a group of countries that are below statistical range in both television and newspaper consumption (such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Ukraine).

Traditionally, the most trusted source of information has been radio broadcast, in recent years closely followed by television broadcast. Yet, interestingly, radio broadcast was almost always a bit more trusted than television broadcast. Public radio broadcast was usually less politicised (or at least resistant to political pressures for longer, in the case of private radio, as it provided less biased news in the 1990s) and public radio broadcast had traditionally a higher quality of programmes. Curiously enough, sources on the Internet were more trusted than their ranking among primary sources of political information would suggest. Moreover, public trust in the media in Slovakia has constantly been above the EU average.

There is a difference in the contribution to democracy shown by private and public media respectively, but there also is a difference in the contribution to democracy between printed media and electronic/digital media, etc. This is evident from a survey done by INEKO, a non-governmental organisation including some 80 local experts. Although this is not a representative survey, it is still a much better overview about the actual roles of different types of media than the opinion of a single expert. The printed media were seen as contributing most to democracy, followed by PSM radio, while PSM television broadcast seemed to be still contributing to democracy while being considered almost at a neutral (medium) standpoint. Similarly, private broadcasting was seen as “neutral” but with a slight tendency to damage democracy, while the contribution of social media to democracy was seen as slightly negative.

There are two additional issues that can be interpreted from this survey. First, a politician, in this case the President of the state, can be seen as playing a more positive role than the media. Secondly, social media are seen as having a rather negative role in democracy. This issue will be discussed later on in detail.

From the perspective of social and political impact, the Slovak public agora is influenced mainly by the major private television channel *Markíza*, the public television *Rozhlas a televízia Slovenska - RTVS* (Radio and Television Slovakia), and some of the key daily newspapers, especially *Sme* and *Nový čas*. For example, the economic/business weekly *Trend* does not serve as an inter-media agenda setter. In other words, although it publishes a lot of scandals and corruption stories, these normally have no socio-political impact unless they are taken up by some of the above mentioned agenda-setting media. For example, a major 2016 scandal nicknamed after its main negative hero, *Bašternák*, was brought to the public attention only in joint efforts by *Denník N* and weekly *Trend*. The media usually prefer the exclusivity of their news reports and only occasionally cooperate - in case of very sensitive issues - before making some scandals public.

Yet this is still not enough – first, there must be implicit cooperation among key agenda-setting and other inter-media agenda-setting media (a situation when media adopt each other's agenda of issues). Second, this public/media pressure must last for a few days at least. Finally, politicians (ideally both from the opposition and coalition) must take this public discussion seriously.

In general, there seems to be a rather low inter-media agenda setting function in Slovakia. This claim is not invalidated by the occasionally present herd-instinct (a mentality characterized by a lack of individual decision-making or thoughtfulness, causing people to think and act in the same way as the majority of those around them) among the major media regarding major popular scandals.

The traditionally (or theoretically) understood strong or clear-cut media/political parallelism is by and large missing among major media in Slovakia. There is presence of a weak ideological affiliation among the majority of the key media. In other words, it is possible to detect whom the media or journalists dislike more or more consistently. It is possible to detect that the majority of the media and journalists show liberal-right or centre-right attitudes. However, there are no typical media/political

affiliations with specific political parties, save for one exception.

Moreover, there seems to be a specific type of media/political parallelism emerging. This media/political parallelism is probably based on a rather atypical, meta-structural level. On one hand, Šlerka (2016) describes a sample of online supporters of (right-wing) Slovak National Party (SNS) and (self-declared or not really typical left-wing) *Smer-SD* “likes” among users of news and other online portals - most frequently television news (this was especially present in the case of news television *TA3* among supporters of *Smer-SD*) and partly tabloids. On the other hand, supporters of at the time (and by and large still) opposition parties most often “liked” printed media. In other words, it appears that a “nationalist-leftist” group of voters prefers different media types than a “liberal-conservative” group of voters. We can only speculate that this has something to do partly with sociological characteristics of each group of supporters and partly, especially in the case of *TA3*, with its (until recently) biased coverage (including non-coverage of certain topics by *TA3*). Perhaps even more importantly, the majority of serious newspapers can be seen as centrist or liberal-right orientated by a majority of supporters that belong to the “nationalist-leftist” group of media content consumers.

As mentioned, the occasional occurrences of traditionally understood media/political parallelism are more nuanced in Slovakia than in many other countries. Indeed, an older study by van Kempen (2007) has shown that media/party parallelism varies considerably among countries. In fact, one can see relatively more often weak and occasional media instrumentalization in Slovakia than just typical media/political parallelism. Similarly, Št?tka (2012) observed that “there seems to be a prevalence of ideological bias over clear-cut political ties in the Slovak media...”

Indeed, our available hard data and a case study based on revelations as well as other studies (Piško, 2016) suggest that only one newspaper (*Pravda*) has shown some political/ideological bias since 2010, while reporting by television news station *TA3* is probably more influenced by commercial and indirectly by political factors (who is in power rather than which ideology it represents) than by ideological factors (Šipoš, 2013).

However, it is also true that there is strong evidence that newspapers *Sme* and *Denník N* reported on Robert Fico (prime minister at the time as well as today) more frequently than other newspapers did and on *the Smer-SD* party (key governmental party at the time as well as today) as well as on members of the government (Struhárik, 2015, Školkay, 2016c). There were almost twice as many mentions in absolute numbers for the *Sme* newspaper and slightly more in relative numbers in the case of *Denník N*. However, this does not mean that either newspaper can be associated with any right-wing or centre-right political party.

In other media, there is a random evidence of occasional hidden weak individual pressure (mostly incidentally revealed in late 2016) in the case of PSM *RTVS* and TV *JOJ*. It is more than likely that this occasional pressure and in some cases editorial bias can be present from time to time in almost all the media. However, this bias is often individual and personal, usually based on long-term established contacts. This bias occasionally takes the form of short-term or long-term preference (resulting in more frequent or more favourable coverage) for a certain politician. It should be mentioned here that sometimes there also is an indirect impact on the owner's commercial interests which is revealed in addition to the direct impact on said commercial interests.

The Prime Minister Robert Fico has expressed his vision of media/political parallelism in late 2016. He divided journalists in two groups. In his view, there is a group of journalists who “deliberately cause damage to the interests of the Slovak Republic”. More specifically, the prime minister named among those who belong to this group “journalists from tabloid media, journalists from newspapers *Sme*, *Denník N*, from public Slovak Television, public Slovak Radio.” It is certainly interesting that even PSM can be seen as anti-governmental media. The prime minister partly referred to the case discussed below (on wiretapped SMS and e-mail communications among various journalists and some spokespersons and politicians), partly to

other recent scandals, and partly he explained his opinion by ownership structures. In the latter case, it was according to the PM Penta, a multinational investment company (of local origin), that was allegedly behind some scandals (especially those scandals related to public procurement in new state-owned hospital, since Penta has interest in this sector). That is why, in the view of the PM, the weekly *Trend* has paid attention to one of these scandals related to public procurement. This was an absurd accusation since the scandal was brought to public attention by anti-corruption NGO jointly with weekly *Trend*. In fact, weekly *Trend* joined the effort of the Foundation Stop Corruption later on.

On the one hand, there certainly is a long-term consistency in the PM's perception on the role of part of the media (by and large intention to cause a damage), but on the other hand also, as it was pointed by some observers, this was equally or even more importantly a cover-up or distraction from governmental scandals, as well as a negative message to potential whistleblowers and/or a new communication strategy that builds upon decreased trust in and importance of traditional media and, finally, a reaction to losing popularity. Ironically, the verbal attack on the journalists contributed to R. Fico's party *Smer-SD* losing popularity, (sociologist Slosiarik in Krbatová, 2016b). Juš?ák (2016) has suggested that part of the public may have interpreted the words of the PM correctly – as their opposite meaning than was their official meaning. Indeed, one can notice contrast between the (by and large positive) perception of the roles of the majority of the media as expressed both by the experts and lay public, especially in contrast to the negative roles of the whole category of politicians. Even opponents of the PSM *RTVS* found it difficult to detect and especially to categorise any political/ideological bias of *RTVS* according to typical and clear political/ideological categories (see interview with Anton Hrnko, MP, in Krbatová, 2016a).

The 2016 case of the overpriced (and probably related to indirect financing of a political party's activities) opening ceremony of the EU Presidency by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs also demonstrated once more that the cost of scandals must be easy to understand for an average citizen (i.e. not a too abstract amount).

Be that as it may, some politicians from different political parties/ideologies may occasionally get hidden preferential treatment (or set agenda) in the same medium. It is, inevitably, a mostly unofficial deal – exclusive information and/or personal friendships for more frequent or better coverage (or they get coverage damaging reputation of their political enemies). Yet a majority of the key editors and journalists seem to be able to maintain their impartiality even when making such moral compromises with controversial or close sources.

It is also true that some media can be ideologically identified as liberal-right (*Sme*, *Denník N*, *Hospodárske noviny*). However, again, this does not mean necessarily that they show significant or any *political* parallelism. Yet when we come back to newspaper *Pravda*, it openly declares its liberal-left ideology. No other newspaper in Slovakia defines its ideology so openly in its mission. Matúš Kostolný, former editor-in-chief of daily *Sme* and current editor-in-chief of newspaper *Denník N*, defined his liberal editorial policy only in an interview as “freedom – internal inside the newspaper as well as freedom outside, promoted by the newspaper” (in Hlav?áková, 2016). Indeed, newspaper *Denník N* was not established as a result of ideological disagreements inside the former editorial office of *Sme*, but in reaction to the indirect attempt of Penta, to what was seen as an unfriendly takeover of “their” (at the time) publishing house. The fact that liberal newspaper *Denník N* is not ideologically closed can be seen in its decision to allow Milan Krajniak, a rather controversial MP, present his openly anti-liberal opinions on its editorial pages.

In contrast, some online media form closed cultural/ideological sects (eg moderately conservative, *de facto* Christian portal such as the online daily *Postoj.sk* or the leftist *Noveslovo.sk*). In addition, there are ethnic Hungarian language online portals which seem to be rather sharply divided according to pro-Orbán and anti-Orbán, or the *SMK* (Hungarian Coalition Party) versus the pro-*Most-Híd* political party. These are discussed in a special section below.

There are also some printed media that openly declare their ideological preference (eg the monthly *Extra Plus* itself declared

a “pro-Slovak and social focus...with majority of readers of national and leftist worldview”) and, in addition, selectively support some politicians in return for higher subscriptions from an institution representing a particular politician/public figure. Interestingly, after public criticism, subscription in this particular case was cancelled.

All nuances related to media/political parallelism can be seen in case studies of *Pravda* (Školkay, 2017, 2016), but also in a scandal that erupted in October 2016. A controversial businessman pointed to a newly established website lipsicovestado.info (of unknown origin, and blocked shortly afterwards, discussed in the section on accountability).

Media

Print

The daily press is the least popular medium in Slovakia. Only 19 percent respondents read daily newspapers (daily or almost daily, according to Eurobarometer 84, p.8). However, according to another source (MEDIAN, 2016), 31 percent of the Slovaks read daily newspapers (“read yesterday”) while 67 percent read at least once in the last 14 days in early 2016 (down from 71 percent in 2013). These two data may not be seen as contradictory, but rather complementary. The real number of regular readers of traditionally understood daily printed press can be around a quarter of the population. Moreover, there is an increasing number of those who subscribe and read only online editions of printed versions of newspapers. For example, newspaper *Sme* sold 12,800 subscriptions of its online edition (in addition to an average of 27,750 hard copies sold) in September 2016. This ratio of hard copies sold versus digital copies was even more pronounced in newspaper *Denník N* (3,500 hard copies versus 19,000 “copies” of the digital edition). Thus, maybe some respondents (or questionnaires) do not differentiate among “digital” and “hard” copies of newspapers. In any case, Se?ik (2014) has calculated that the average circulation of the daily press per 1,000 citizens in Slovakia was less than half of the average of the European Union member states, and four or five times less than that in comparatively similar states such as Finland or Denmark.

Probably the oldest Slovak weekly newspaper is Catholic weekly *Katolícke noviny*, published for some 160 years. The most popular is tabloid newspaper *Nový ?as* (New Time). This is followed by another tabloid *Plus Jeden De?* (One More Day).

Nový ?as is an offshoot of *?as*, which under communism was a marginal newspaper of a former puppet political party. *Nový ?as* however, displays a radical transformation both in the content and circulation. It is a generalist newspaper with no political affiliation. The number of sold copies in September 2016 was 89,000. It is owned by Ringier Axel Springer.

Plus Jeden De? has been published for a decade. The number of sold copies was 42,000 in September 2016. It is owned by the Penta.

The quality press is represented by newspapers *Pravda* (Truth), *Sme* (We Are), *Denník N* (Daily N) and business/economic daily *Hospodárske noviny* (Economy Newspaper).

Pravda self-defines as a liberal-left (center-left) oriented daily newspaper. It boasts almost a century-long history as the former official newspaper of the former communist party. It does not verify its circulation independently, but it stated its average daily circulation for 2015 at over 61,000 copies. Its ownership structure is unclear too. Officially, there is a single owner. The daily has been owned by the Florena company since 2010. The business deal was facilitated by the Slovak investment group J&T. This financial group is seen by some people as linked to businessmen close to the political party *Smer-SD*

. These claims are difficult to confirm or dismiss, but there are some puzzling issues behind the Florena company. First, Florena is exclusively involved in the property business. Second, the company's headquarters are in Prague, in the Czech Republic. This is not necessarily unusual however, considering that Mr. Biermann actually has two private addresses, one in Slovakia and one in the Czech Republic, as well as other companies registered in the Czech Republic. Initially, the J&T group did not exclude a possible direct interest in purchasing *Pravda*, and have the right of first buyer in the event that the daily should be put up for sale. All these circumstances raise more doubts than answers.

Sme is considered as a liberal-right (center-right) oriented quality/elite newspaper, though it does not openly declare either ideological or political affiliation. Established in 1993, most of its original staff seceded from the daily *Smena* as a result of the political pressure of the government at that time. The number of sold hard copies in September 2016 was over 27,000. In July 2016, P.M. Robert Fico labelled the key agenda setting daily *Sme* as an anti-government, biased and even seditious daily newspaper. Newspaper *Sme* is co-owned by Penta, which, however, has a minority share (partly as a result of public discussion) and thus practically, for the time being, zero editorial influence.

Denník N (established 2014/2015) is, ironically, an off-shot of daily *Sme*. However, this time there was no political pressure behind the decision to leave and found a new daily newspaper, but rather market pressure. More specifically, a large part of leading editors of daily *Sme* was afraid of the new owner, the private investment group Penta (seen as promoting a hostile takeover).

Penta has purchased more media since 2014 (currently concentrated mostly under News and Media Holding). Penta has purchased the publishing house Trend Holding (publishes weekly *Trend* and portal on media *Medialne.sk*), as well as publishing company Spoločnosť 7 Plus (eg newspaper *Plus Jeden Deň*, weekly *Plus 7 dní*, webportal *Aktualne.sk*). Penta has expanded into the media market in the Czech Republic too.

Hospodárske noviny newspaper was previously a federal weekly periodical, but after the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993, it has been converted into a business daily – the only one of its kind at present in Slovakia. The paper can be seen as an elite newspaper and does not claim to follow any specific ideology, but it clearly shows free enterprise leanings. In coverage of economy it shows centre-right liberal positions, while in political issues it might be defined as a centrist newspaper (neither ideologically conservative, nor liberal). The number of sold copies in September 2016 was 11,650. It is owned by a Czech entrepreneur and currently Czech politician, Andrej Babiš.

There is a specialised sport newspaper *Denník Šport* (Daily Sport). There also is a regional newspaper *Új Szó* (New Word) published in Hungarian language and covering southern parts of Slovakia. The number of sold copies in September 2016 was 17,500. Regional or rather city dailies also include *Korzár* (city of Košice, number of sold copies in September 2016 was 9,000) and *Prešovský večerník* (city of Prešov). *Prešovský večerník* daims to publish 9,000 copies.

Radio

Radio broadcasts were listened (daily or almost daily) by 56 percent listeners or about 66 percent daily and 90 percent “last week”. Private *Rádio Expres* was the market leader, followed closely by the public radio first channel *Rádio Slovensko*, followed with some distance by *Fun rádio* and two other private stations. In other words, the radio market was more diverse than the television market. However, if we look at PSM radio as a group, then PSM radio stations had a 41 percent share.

Politically, *Fun rádio* is owned by Boris Kollár, MP, current head of political party *Sme rodina* (We are family). This new political party can be seen as a protest anti-establishment party. *Sme rodina* was established shortly before the parliament elections held in early 2016. Moreover, B. Kollár is the sole owner of Fun Media Group a.s. This group is the exclusive media representative of ten regional radio channels (with about a third of market shares in the target group) and runs some web

portals too.

Television

Television broadcasts were watched by 80 percent of the population – daily or almost daily or 83 percent “watched yesterday”. Interestingly, Slovak citizens did watch more programmes in their non-mother tongue than in other EU countries (SK 63 percent, EU28 38 percent).

The majority of viewers was receiving TV signals either via satellite (48 percent) or cable networks (25 percent). Some 14 percent of viewers were using IPTV and 12 percent were using DVB-T. *TV Markíza* and her network programmes *Dajto* and *Doma* stopped broadcasting in DVB-T in January 2017. This may mean that a costly switchover from analogue to digital DVB-T broadcasting may end in a failure – instead of delivering on its promise of offering new services and higher quality of broadcast, it will remain a rather costly terrestrial broadcasting for a tiny part of population.

The public service television broadcast has two units. The first, called *Jednotka*, is a general information, education, and entertainment/sports channel. The second television unit, *Dvojka*, is focusing on more educated viewers and specific groups of viewers such as ethnic and religious minorities, and socio-professional groups such as soldiers or fishermen.

Markíza Group operates *TV Markíza*, *Doma* (since 2009, mostly re-broadcasted own and other production)) and *Dajto* (since 2012, mostly re-broadcasted own and other production). It also operates portal *Tvnoviny.sk*. There are some other minor TV channels that belong to what is called JOJ Group or JOJ Media House respectively: *TV JOJ*, *PLUS* (mostly re-broadcasted own and other production), *Wau* (younger female audience, mostly re-broadcasted own and other production), *Rik TV* (paid channel for children aged 4 to 12 years) and *JOJ cinema* (movie channel for viewers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia). TV channel *Ťuki TV* for younger children is broadcasted exclusively for Slovak Telekom, a.s. Moreover, JOJ Media House owns Harad company which through another company provides complex services to some private radio broadcasters. JOJ Group or JOJ Media House claim to be the most active in the fusion of online and social media with traditional television broadcasting (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, web *Huste.sk*, *Joj.sk* and *Noviny.sk* and online TV archive). JOJ Media House has some investments in the Czech Republic, Croatia and Austria.

In both cases, “sister” channels are specialised in particular groups of viewers, with mostly re-broadcasted programmes from original TV as well as older foreign programmes.

The news television *TA3* is also owned by a Slovak owner, Grafobal Company. This company is involved primarily in the production of print and packaging materials. However, its owner is active in many other business activities. *TA3* is the first and only cable and satellite news television in Slovakia. It started broadcasting in September 2001. The data on market share can be interpreted in a way that the most popular TV station is the first nationwide, commercial broadcaster *TV Markíza*. This market leader is followed by *TV JOJ*, which emerged from a network of regional stations with a dominant ‘founder’ in the East Slovak city of Košice. *TV JOJ* is more commercially orientated in its content, especially in its news. The first public television channel *Jednotka* is at third place. Recently, its popularity shows some signs of revival, especially in the main news broadcast. It is important to note the rather high share of other television channels watched in Slovakia with 35 percent share. This is related mainly to foreign television broadcasts watched in Slovakia (especially and traditionally the Czech, Hungarian and some German language television channels, but increasingly other foreign language channels among younger generations).

The general trend in trust was clearly visible until the end of 2015. Until then, the most trusted was *TV Markíza*, and although news of *TV JOJ* kept its level of trust, nevertheless, the trust in news by *TV JOJ* was outperformed step by step by PSM *RTVS*. The data for 2016 suggest that trust in news of *TV Markíza* was put on (almost) equal level with trust in news of *RTVS*

. At the same time, news TV TA3 managed to improve its rating (related to trust) significantly in 2016 too.

Digital Media

The Internet is used daily or almost daily by 53 percent of the population, but significantly more often by younger generations. In the age group 15-24, this is 91 percent. (Standard Eurobarometer 84, p.8). It is significant that 60 percent of respondents believe that social media are modern media where to get information about political issues. However, only 34 percent of respondents agree that information on social media is not to be trusted. In any case, 55 percent of respondents believe that social media are a good way to express itself on political issues (Standard Eurobarometer 84, p.10). An older study by Velšic (2012) has suggested the majority of the population aged 14+ already used social networks a few years ago. A more recent study by Velšic (2016) has suggested that especially younger supporters of radical right *Kotleba's SNS* political party are the most interested in current events via the Internet. Moreover, younger generation mostly supports either liberal (but in some policy areas such as migration rather conservative) SaS political party or *Kotleba's SNS* political party (each with about 24 percent support).

Indeed, the online media are increasingly important (especially with regard to re-emerging political/ideological parallelism). There are many different platforms in Slovakia that represent different political/ideological worldviews. Indeed, it appears that the media market has fundamentally changed in the last few years. Many people read (sometimes in addition to hard copies of newspapers) the online versions of newspapers as well as online-only newspapers and news sites. In late 2016, the most popular news portals included *Sme.sk*, *Aktuality.sk*, *Cas.sk*, *Topky.sk*, *Pravda.sk*, *Webnoviny.sk*, *Tvnoviny.sk*, *Hnonline.sk* and *Markiza.sk*.

Moreover, traditional media increasingly use social media for various purposes. For example, two of the above mentioned scandals covering overpriced costs for the opening ceremony and logo presentation by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs as well as the prime minister's controversial follow-up reaction and attack on "some" journalists, these were obviously discussed in the media. The shorter or longer recordings of these discussions were presented online on Facebook. For example, *Radio Express* anchor Braňo Závodský uploaded his radio interview on FB (in audiovisual format) with the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs in which they both discussed this scandal in November 2016. This video was watched by over 52,000 viewers on FB in a few days. In contrast, 30 previous videos by the same journalist received attention of a few thousand of interested "visitors" each.

Similarly, newspaper *Denník N* uploaded on FB a two-minute extract of a radio interview with the Prime Minister R. Fico (only in audio version) in which the prime minister criticised "some anti-governmental and anti-Slovak journalists". This [video](#) became quite popular with around 60,000 views within a few days (in contrast to an average of some 5,000 or less views). (The [full interview](#) is also available in audio version uploaded by an anonymous source). Newspaper *Denník N* started uploading videos in early November 2014. Since that time, in two years, the newspaper uploaded over 700 videos. *Denník N* had some 92,000 fans on FB in late 2016.

In contrast, newspaper *Sme* seems to be less active on FB with videos, although it had 108,000 fans on FB in late 2016. *Sme* has uploaded 376 videos as of early December 2016 during the same period. More importantly, these videos had 20 times less views in total (in comparison with newspaper *Denník N*). It appears that *Sme* has adopted a different strategy. *Sme* runs its own [online television](#). This is more popular communication channel than FB, with more videos (a few a day) and more viewers (top five videos had between 7,000 and 37,000 views in a week on December 2, 2016). The top video was actually [a funny interpretation](#) of the above-mentioned scandal (*Ďažký týždeň s Janom Gorduličom: O Ficovom vzťahu k médiám a špinavým protislovenským prostitútkam*, November 30, 2016)

Social Networks

Reuers Digital News Report 2016 does not include Slovakia. However, if we compare results for Hungary and the Czech Republic (an average of which usually fits historically well for Slovakia, with Slovak indicators slightly more similar to Hungary than the Czech Republic), then we can see that 57 percent of the users in Hungary and 51 percent of under-35 users in the Czech Republic access FB for news on a weekly basis. We can assume that data for Slovakia would be somewhere in between these numbers. Indeed, Special Eurobarometer, 2015 has suggested that social media were followed by 54% Slovaks. Moreover, GfK Research from May 2016 provided evidence that FB was used by 68 % at least once a month, while it was used daily by 45%. YouTube was daily watched by 21% and on monthly basis by 63%.

The media that were most “liked” on FB include: music radio *Europa 2* (590,000), tabloid newspaper *Nový čas* (450,000), traffic radio *Express* (440,000), tabloid news portal *Topky.sk* (360,000), For comparison, TV *Markíza* had 340,000 likes, and TV *JOJ* had 313,000 likes in late 2016 (Poláš, 2017). FB indeed seems to be new and major tool for promotion of news and articles in general (and thus, indirectly, popularity of a medium), For example, *Denník N* was able to utilise speedy upload of some of its articles on FB that it raised some [questions](#) about manipulation of online readership statistics.

Although traditional media, especially television and radio broadcast are still the most popular media and although conspiratory webs such as *Hlavnespravy.sk*, *Parlamentnelisty.sk*, *Medzicas.sk*, *Slobodnyvysielac.sk*, *Zemavek.sk* have rather narrow focus of topics they report about, their success among their readers is precisely in their narrow focus of topics. These topics are usually rather politically sensitive and controversial ones. There is, for example, pro-Russian web portal *Hlavnespravy.sk* with estimated rather high readership.

In total, there are dozens and dozens of web platforms in the Czech and Slovak languages that publish controversial political content. The project *Konspiratori.sk* has assessed and compiled most of them. Although there may be partially justified criticism of the used methodology (Fábry, 2016), there is little doubt that there are indeed quite often “alternative” worldviews or unreliable data presented.

The top Slovak language “alternative” web portal is *Protiprudu.org* (9.7 negative points out of 10). Perhaps ironically, this web portal has published an [article](#) on 50 types of propaganda. Then there are many Czech language “alternative” web portals. Among Slovak language “alternative” portals, at rank 22 (9.1 points) there is *Nemesis.sk* as well as (rank 23, points 9.1) there is *Necenzurovane.net*. This last one is an interesting web portal since it offers translation of its text by Google Translator in 12 languages, including into Hebrew. Moreover, it offers statistical data (returning visits around 300 a day, new visits around 150-200 a day in late November 2016). This suggest really very microscopic sample of interested readers.

In line with the general discussion in many other EU member states, the Ministry of Interior also believes that biased information is being disseminated on purpose. This biased or clearly misleading information is supposed to destabilise the state and its foreign policy. Obviously, alternative websites seem to be the key suspects. As we will see, there is some truth in this claim.

However, similar pro-Russian and conspiratory messages can occasionally be found in long-established biweeklies such as *Literárny týždenník* or monthlies such as *Extra plus*.

Tóth (2016a) did a software-assisted analysis of FB fanpages (covering mid August – September 20, 2016) of selected alternative webportals – *Hlavnespravy.sk* (rank 56, 7.8 negative points), *Parlamentnelisty.sk* (rank 74, 6.4 negative points), *Slobodnyvysielac.sk* (not listed). Tóth’s analyses have brought the following results. The discussions on the fan page of *Hlavnespravy.sk* could be divided into two categories. The first group of discussants was mostly interested in foreign policy

(especially the conflict between USA and Russia). The second key topic of discussion is the search for truth. This line of discussion is connected with the first group with links on the role of the EU in this process.

At the fanpage of *Parlamentnelisty.sk* the truth was also a key topic. Moreover, foreign policy is also of interest, this time focused on the EU and immigration. Finally, the fanpage of *Slobodnyvysielac.sk* is more similar to *Hlavnespravy.sk*. In addition, discussion here concerns EU and Turkey relationships, as well as propaganda, and George Soros.

The use of social networks by politicians may sometimes backfire. This happened to Andrej Danko, speaker of the Slovak Parliament and chairman of Slovak National Party in January 2017. Danko and some other top politicians had been promoted in their military careers (related to the past compulsory military service) by separate acts issued by two different ministers of defence in 2016. When this was revealed, in January 2017, this promotion was seen by and large both by the media and many commentators at social networks as unfair and absurd. It was seen as absurd since there was no special reason for that promotion, although it is true that in the past, during compulsory military service, this was standard approach in order to expand ranks of reserve officers. However, this time this was not the case. The official explanation given by the minister of defence (a nominee of the Slovak National Party), stated that Danko received this high military rank for his active support of the modernisation of the army and his help during the introduction of short-term voluntary military service (active military reserves). One could argue that for such cooperation some form of lesser military honour could be sufficient. For example, a Decree of the Minister of Defense (ÚLP-14-35/2015-OdL) would allow to award a Military Cross – Memorial Cross of the Head of the General Staff for such successful cooperation. Others pointed later on that even another internal directive of the ministry was not followed (Šnidl, 2017). The promotion was seen even as absurdly excessive - Danko was promoted eight ranks, from corporal to captain. In any case, this was initially believed to be a legal act. Moreover, Peter Gajdoš, the minister of defence, explained six days later the reason why this promotion was not made publicly, as follows: “because I had decided so”. The reaction by the media and especially among social networks was rather extensive and mostly negative. The Slovak National Party and Andrej Danko’s webpages on Facebook had to be blocked by both SNP and Danko himself for some time, to stop the flood of public criticism and sometimes even hate speech. Ironically, Danko had provoked this public reaction by kissing his military insignia after initial media criticism at a public conference. In fact, it appears that an excessively emotional act – kissing of military insignia – has caused all the scandal and discussions on social networks. Moreover, Danko encouraged the public to comment on this issue on his FB status. This again backfired, when even the wife of a serving military officer sharply criticised Danko. Obviously, for some time even some fake pages with Andrej Danko appeared on FB. Later on, the tabloid newspaper *Nový čas* encouraged readers to contribute to making fun of Danko by a call to send their own photos with military insignia (published in large size in the paper). In short, the scandal that had began by printed media reporting, was widespread by television broadcast, expanded into social media as a result of excessive emotional public conference held by the main (as it turned out, negative) hero and was further negatively promoted by printed media again. Finally, the SNS issued a statement in which it declared a different use of social media – only for informing the public but not for public discussion.

Opinion Makers

The US presidential elections suggested that in addition to deeper social factors, there is an increasingly important role of social networks in news consumption and public opinion shaping. This is increasingly present in Slovakia too – especially in case of various protest parties and movements.

The GLOBSEC 2016 study indicates that 17 percent of respondents in Slovakia believe more in “alternative“ media (this result is similar to Hungary but shows better results than in the Czech Republic). However, this ratio is much higher among young people – 29 percent. Fortunately, magazines published by high school and university students do not seem to show any signs of conspiratory content.

Analytically, the credibility of social media can be seen from three perspectives: as media credibility, source credibility and content credibility. Buzová (2014) compiled some international research that suggests that social media users trust information coming from their online friends, but, allegedly, they trust information from other sources less. In such cases the online users utilise their cognitive abilities to differentiate message importance and to define message credibility. However, among some groups of voters and supporters, eg among right-wing nationalists such as those who are supporters and voters of Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (previously ?SNS, now *K?SNS*), 53 percent of those who voted for this party trusted alternative media (includes also print media) more than the traditional media. These media (eg *Hlavnespravy.sk* or *Slobodnyvysielac.sk* or *Lifenews.sk*) prefer anti-system (protest or populist) politicians such as Kotleba and his party (Šnidl, 2016 a,b). Indeed, this party *K?SNS* had more than 78,000 likes and its leader, Marián Kotleba, had more than 73,000 likes on FB in November 2016. This suggests a relatively high importance of online communication for this party and its leader. Indeed, *K?SNS* party fanpage also had the most frequent use of an old greeting used during WWII in Slovakia (Tóth, 2016b).

However, the most frequent discussions at fanpages of key political parties one could find were *O?ANO*, then at a distance were *Sme rodina* and *SaS* (Tóth, 2016).

The top opinion-maker of social media in Slovakia is actually a youtuber nicknamed Gogo. His *GoGoManTV* is popular among Youtube users (1.4 million followers), but also on Instagram (482,000) and FB (186,000). There are additional seven youtubers who have more than 100,000 followers. For example, Matej Slážanský a.k.a. Selassie runs vlog *Menameselassie* with more than 438,000 followers as of November 2016. FB is more dominated by typical local celebrities such as rap singer Rytmus (273,000 likes), rap singer Majk Spirit (265,000), radio and television entertainers Junior and Marcel (261,000), actor and showman Latinák (238,000), radio and television entertainers Adela and Sajfa (206,000), cyclist Sagan (196,000), tennis player Cibulková (194k,000, pop singer Dara Rolins (197,000).

Out of these celebrities, the most influential is probably Adela (Banášová). She is present in radio (as host of entertaining and general regular radio talk shows), television (as moderator of various shows but also has her own late night TV show in a news TV TA3). Moreover, she is among columnists of *Hospodárske noviny*. She is one of those who did not find as a problematic conspiratory magazine and web portal *Zem a Vek* (The Earth and Age). The video in which she talked about this magazine in a positive light had around one million views (700,000 FB + 300,000 YouTube).

Among politicians and political parties, it is, perhaps surprisingly, the President Andrej Kiska who is a dominant player on the Internet. For those unfamiliar with Slovak politics, it should be explained that Andrej Kiska became president as a candidate with no previous experience in politics. The President successfully used live streaming from one of his press conferences via FB. Kiska also had established his blog on the website of newspaper *Sme* in June 2012, before he became President. Since then he published 41 blogs with average readership of 13,062 (November 2016). However, the last entry is from February 2014. Apparently, since June 2014 Kiska uses Twitter (and FB) instead of his blog. Since then, he made 75 tweets and has over 60,000 followers. Clearly, the President uses FB more frequently. There he publishes news almost on a daily basis, sometimes even twice a day. A rather unusual cooperation among the most popular youtuber and the President should also be mentioned. The President participated to a [YouTube presentation](#) prepared by the above-mentioned Gogo youtuber in late 2016.

In contrast, the Prime Minister Robert Fico used Twitter less often, with some 67 tweets and 254 followers since November

2009 according to data from November/December 2016 (<https://twitter.com/fico2014>). Robert Fico used Twitter to pointing to his message at YouTube. This seems to be a clever strategy since otherwise there are plenty of videos that make fun of the prime minister on YouTube. It should be mentioned that there were some fake Twitter accounts of Robert Fico too. Robert Fico uses FB too. He [joined FB](#) in 2013 and had some 27,000 followers in late 2016. For example, in reaction to an article published by tabloid newspaper *Plus Jeden De?* in early December 2016, the prime minister accused the media of lying and then put emphasis on the hidden agenda of Penta's owner in his [short video](#). The PM explicitly mentioned in his video commentary put on FB on January 8, 2017 that he intends to use direct communication with people instead of the standard media.

It should be explained here that it is actually typical that politicians in Slovakia established their blogs at websites of newspapers and weeklies even when they do not like them (such as Prime Minister Fico's [blog](#) on Sme's website). Robert Fico has published 23 contributions on his blog with some 36,000 average readership since April 2011. Ironically, one of his latest blogs was a criticism of host newspaper *Sme* from July 2016 with headline "*Newspaper Sme causes damage to its readers*". However, the PM publishes his opinions on the blog of business newspaper *Hospodárske noviny* and on the [website](#) of the Government too.

In fact, there are three or four key media that host the majority of blogs of the most important politicians: *Sme*, *Trend*, *Hospodárske noviny* and *Denník N*. For example, the website of newspaper *Sme* hosts blogs by Andrej Danko, Speaker of the Parliament and Chairman of SNS (36 blogs since July 2011, last blog February 19, 2015, average readership 615), the blog of Béla Bugár, Chairperson of political party *Most-Híd* (50 blogs since May 2011, last blog entry November 11, 2016, average readership 1,645). For example, the website of newspaper *Hospodárske noviny* (Blogy.hnonline.sk) presents ideas of Jozef Mihál (SaS party, 24 blogs, 8,145 average readers since February 2016), Milan K?ážko (various right-wing parties), Renára Zmajkovi?ová (*Smer-SD*, 37 blogs, 1,059 average readers since May 2014), Alojz Hlina, Chairperson of *KDH* political party (with just one blog entry in November 2014). One can find here also Igor Matovi?, leader of *O?ANO* movement (last entry October 2012) as well as Miloslav Laj?ák, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs (last entry April 2010). For example, the website of weekly *Trend* hosts blogs of Eugen Jurzyca (SaS), Martin Klus (SaS) and some others, especially various think tanks with focus on economy and reforms. Interestingly, the website of newspaper *Pravda* hosts blogs but these are often registered under nicknames.

Another politician that works with FB rather frequently is Boris Kollár, MP (*Sme rodina* – We are family) (Kern, 2016). Kollár was the most active national politician on FB according to TASR statistics in November 2016. However, many of his contributions and especially some fans were seen as populist, xenophobic and even racist (see Ben?ik, 2017). The first most active Slovak politician was Ivan Štefanec, MEP, with some 8,500 likes. Kollár himself had almost 89,000 likes on FB, while his political party just under 60,000 likes in November 2016. However, Freedom and Solidarity Party (SaS) had more than 121,410 likes in November 2016, thus being the most "liked" Slovak political party on FB. This can be explained by its innovative and partly liberal (and rather conservative views in some areas such as immigration) views, more popular among younger people. *O?ANO* (Common People and Independent Personalities) had almost 46,000 likes, *Smer-SD* (the strongest party in Parliament) had more than 31,00 likes, Slovak National Party had more than 30,000 likes, *Most-Híd* less than 10,000 likes and out of the parliament *KDH* - Christian Democratic Movement less than 10,000 likes.

Although there were occasional problems with FB's liberal policies ("the world is diverse" - this approach began to change in early 2017), local prosecutor general urged people to report hate and racist speech. There are reports when courts sued local people for their hate speech using online social media. Finally, perhaps it should be noted that there are opinion-makers that are behind the scene: media owners, editors-in-chief, etc (see list of 30 the most influential ones in *Nový ?as víkend*, supplement, 4/2017, p.4-14).

Sources

Print

- [Dennik N](#)
- [Dennik šport](#)
- [Katolicke noviny](#)
- [Hospodárske noviny](#)
- [Korzar](#)
- [Nový čas](#)
- [Plusk Jeden de?. Plus 7 dní](#)
- [Pravda](#)
- [Prešovský večerník](#)
- [Sme](#)
- [Trend](#)
- [Új szo](#)

Radio

- [Fun rádio](#)
- [Rádio Anténa Rock](#)
- [Rádio.Best FM](#)
- [Rádio Beta](#)
- [Rádio Európa 2](#)
- [Rádio Expres](#)
- [Rádio FM](#)
- [Rádio.Frontinus](#)
- [Rádio Jemné](#)
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- [Rádio Liptov](#)
- [Rádio.Lumen](#)
- [Rádio Rebeca](#)
- [Rádio Regina](#)
- [Rádio Slovensko](#)
- [Rádio Si Ty](#)
- [Rádio Vlna](#)

Television

- [Dajto](#)
- [Doma.](#)
- [Dovjka](#)
- [Jednotka](#)
- [Joj](#)
- [Joj Cinema](#)

- [Markiza](#)
- [Plus](#)
- [Rik](#)
- [TA 3](#)
- [TV BA](#)
- [?uki TV](#)
- [Wau](#)

Opinion makers

- [Fico's blog](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

In general, only limited numbers of Slovak journalists have declared membership in journalism associations. In late 2016, it could be estimated that perhaps only 10 percent of Slovak journalists (if we exclude students, pensioners and freelancers) were members of the largest journalism organisation, the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists (SSN).

The largest journalism organisation, the SSN, has always been somewhere between (weak and initially informal) trade union organisation and professional organisation. Since 2015, SSN in its Statute defines itself as both “trade union” and “professional (guild)” organisation. However, a more detailed analysis shows that the trade union role of the SSN is rather limited. Formally, a regular member of SSN can ask for support in labour conflicts as well as ask for social help according to Statute of the Social Fund. Social support can be provided in a form of reimbursement of medicines (max 50 percent of purchasing price, but also max €50,00), then a regular member can ask for financial support during an unemployment period (must be registered at the labour office for at least six months and income per family member can not be higher than 1.5 minimum of standard of living). The support during unemployment can be of maximum 300,00 €. Both types of support can be provided only once in 12 months. In addition, there is the possibility of *ad hoc* financial help during personal emergency situations which are subject to a special approval.

However, SSN lost the majority of its savings (some €100,000) which were kept in its Social Fund in the last years. The money from the Social Fund were invested in two big projects that failed in years 2011-2012. Nevertheless, the SSN is able to financially cover all requests for social help from other sources, namely from the (state-supported) Literary Fund and the Clean Word Foundation.

These low levels of financial support suggest a merely symbolic role of the SSN in providing social support for its members in need (and thus acting as a traditional trade union). In other words, the SSN offers only symbolic financial help. For example, an average salary in 2016 was estimated at around €900, while minimal wage was €405 in 2016. It can be estimated that the journalists employed full-time earned around €460 regionally, and between €700 up to 1,130 (gross) in and around the capital city.

SSN also provides legal advice via an external law office. The SSN annually receives a few dozen cases when individual

journalists complain about breaching their labour rights, access to information or suggestions related to changes in legislation. There have been four new cases related to a libel case or other breach of a duty of a journalist in 2016. Since 2014, only one legal case in which SSN was involved has been decided - with negative results for a journalist at the first instance. There were two such cases in 2015 and four legal cases in 2014 (email from Daniel Modrovský, chairman of the SSN, November 10, 2016)

Interestingly, SSN mentions that it can provide financial support during a strike. However, this type of financial support should be regulated by a special status. This status does not exist. Similarly, there are not known cases when SSN was actually involved in collective bargaining related to collective contracts with employers.

Both regular and irregular members are obliged to express solidarity when enforcing basic rights of SSN members as well as other partner organisations of the International Federation of Journalists.

Journalist Associations

There are *de iure* or formally three journalism organisations. These are the *Slovak Syndicate of Journalists (SSN)*, the *Slovak Section of Association of European Journalists (SSAEJ)* and the *Slovak Association of Journalists (SAN)*.

A journalist can actually be a member of all three associations, if he or she decides so. Practically almost anybody can be registered as a member of one of the three main journalism organisations. In other words, there is a very low threshold for somebody to qualify as a journalist, either in a sense of being a member of a journalism association, or as one who works as a journalist. There are currently no special or difficult rules or professional conditions which would qualify an applicant to become a professionally registered journalist. Moreover, for claiming to be a journalist, one does not need to be a member of any professional association.

The most important, oldest (since 1990) and with largest membership (1,500 members in November 2016) is the SSN. SSN is member of International Federation of Journalists and European Federation of Journalists. In addition to formal conditions for membership - such as paying an entry fee and an annual membership due - in the largest journalism organisation SSN, there are three general professional and ethical conditions: to acknowledge the principles of freedom and democracy; to creatively participate in the production of journalistic content on all types of mass media; and to derive the major source of one's income from this type of work. However, there is a special category of extraordinary membership. Employees of journalists, owners and co-owners of media with majority shares can be extraordinary members of SSN, if they are active as journalists. In addition, "publicists" can also be extraordinary members of the SSN. SSN is (formally) more strict than other organisations in conditioning its continuous membership on permanent journalistic activity. For example, a member (with exception of retired members) who does not have a justifiable reason for not being actively participating in journalistic activity, and this can be proven, may lose its membership status. It should be mentioned that after recent parliamentary elections in Poland some Polish journalists declared their interest to become members of SSN.

The Slovak Section of the European Association of Journalists was launched in 2009. It is a very small organisation, an elite club of journalists with cosmopolitan or at least European perspectives, with about fifty members only.

The SAN was established around the year 2000. However, this association is no longer really active, considering that its last congress was held in 2007 and its last public statement was made in 2012.

News Agencies

There are two main local agencies in Slovakia. First, there is the News Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR). This is a

public service institution (Act No. 358/2008 on the News Agency of the Slovak Republic). Second, there is a private SITA agency. In addition, there is the Press Agency of Cities and Villages of Slovakia (TAMO). Its focus is on regional events.

There also is a Roma Media Center (ME.CEM). It also monitors other media's reporting on Roma issues.

TASR has evolved from the former federal news agency after 1992. The director-general of TASR is voted in by a five-strong board. The board is elected by the Parliament. TASR officially claims to release about 250,000 news releases annually. However, its own production (without export and special services such as cooperation with students) is actually only around 100,000 word items, 12,000 audio items, 46,000 photos as well as almost 9,000 videos (data for 2015). TASR employs about 120 editors and correspondents.

TASR gets a lot of money through contracts with the state to fulfill objectives in the public interest as stipulated in the law as well as occasional additional money for specialised projects. For example, TASR received €2.2m from the Ministry of Culture for 2016 year (Contract 68/2015/M). It is clear that regardless of its ability to increase its income (between 30 percent and 175 percent in various segments of its markets) in the 2014-2015 years, TASR could not compete independently on the market. TASR received between €1.2m and 4.3m annually in governmental grants in the 2011-2016 period. This represents a substantial part of its annual income.

Moreover, although in its Annual Report (2016, 37) TASR mentions that "TASR is a consolidated and well-managed institution", it also mentions (p.10) that it actually runs an outdated and unreliable editorial system. Yet TASR has indeed attempted to catch up with digital technologies in other areas. It manages various online media. Most recently it has launched the first public service news website in English, *Newsnow.sk*. Within an older publicly accessible news web servers in the Slovak language, *teraz.sk*, TASR has created an incubator for the monitoring of social media networks. The first results of this monitoring can be seen in sections Politicians on FB and International news on Twitter (*Politici na Facebooku, Zahrani?ie na Twitteri*). Moreover, online TV, *Tablet.tv*, has broadcasted 1,447 programmes and 370 live broadcasts in 2015. *Tablet.TV* specialises in live broadcasting, production of original programmes and news reporting. Its programme *Slovakia 24/7* is the only TV news programmes about Slovakia in English language.

In addition, TASR runs general and specialised web portals such as *Webmagazín*, *Vtedy.sk*, *Školské noviny*, *Školský servis*, *Útulkovo*, *Vyhrávam* and *Zamestnaj sa*. These portals had 3.739,548 unique visitors in 2014, while in 2015 their total number of unique visitors reached 11.332,938 (based on cookies, *Gemius.sk*).

SITA was established as a news agency in 1997. It was more a political decision of that time business people close to opposition than just a business decision. At that time, there was a rather difficult internal political situation in Slovakia and the opposition was afraid of freedom of the press. Therefore, one of the key instruments for guaranteeing freedom of speech seemed to be an independent news agency. After the regime change, after parliamentary elections in 1998, SITA introduced specialized services for businesses and institutions in 2001. Since 2004 SITA runs news portal *Webnoviny.sk* (with subsections focused at health, travel, business, life style and female audiences). In addition, SITA runs the following online accessible specialised projects: [Prservis.sk](#), [vEnergetike.sk](#), [voFinanciach.sk](#) and [vZdravotnictve.sk](#). SITA is present on FB too.

SITA has over a hundred full-time reporters, editors, analysts, and dozens of other part-time staff members. SITA reports that it produces over 400 agency news items per day, dozens of sector overviews in various languages and media monitoring services. SITA increasingly specialises to become a provider of "individualized information solutions."

SITA was the key facilitator when Penta entered into business with publisher of newspaper *Sme*.

SITA has clearly a disadvantageous position which is caused by state policy and not so much by lack of activity of the Anti-monopoly Authority. However, there are occasional voices among journalism professionals that support subsidies for TASR considering the importance of quality reporting via wire agency for the whole media sector. Other voices, based on critical evidence, questioned TASR's political impartiality. Specifically, TASR gave undue prominence in its new service to extra-parliamentary *Slovak National Party* and its leader in 2015. However, after public criticism this biased coverage was stopped.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs still registers foreign journalists or local journalists who work for foreign media. As of late 2016, there were eight officially accredited foreign journalists from seven countries.

Audience measurement organisations

MEDIAN Agency runs the MML-TGI media monitoring project. This is, in their words, the most extensive (8,000 interviews) and continuous (since 1996) study about consumption with more than 300 types of services and 3,000 individual brands connected to data on television ratings, radio ratings, print media ratings and online activities. In addition, its RADIOPROJECT includes a sample of 1,000 respondents surveyed monthly and the results are published every 3-month moving average, thus the overall sample amounts to 3,000 respondents. The results are published monthly. The data contain basic information about radios, possibility of reception, listenership from last week and yesterday, with detailed indicators and shares, including the basic demographics of the respondent. The adMeter technology was launched onto the market in 2012 as part of a pilot radio and television audience measurement.

The Interactive Advertising Bureau Slovakia (IAB, previously known as Association of Internet Media until 2011) is an association of 34 media and advertising companies. One of the self-declared tasks of IAB is also to contribute to the professionalisation of the Internet as an advertising medium through providing single source data related to audience measurement and socio-demographic profiles of Internet media. It runs AIMmonitor which is an online media monitoring tool based on *gemiusAudience™*.

TNS Slovakia is part of international networks WPP and Kantar Group. TNS Slovakia offers complete marketing research. TNS Slovakia only partially specialises in media research within Section Custom Media (ad-hoc research plus supplemental information on viewership measurement). TNS Slovakia claims to be strong in peplemeter method of measurement of viewerships of television. This has been realised since 2004 (sample is 1,200 households).

Agency FOCUS was established in 1991. FOCUS has implemented more than 700 research projects in various areas of marketing and public opinion polls. FOCUS carries researches with large samplings (2,000-3,000 respondents). It claims to have the most stable and experienced team of interviewers (approximately 200 interviewers). However, in the last years it has not focused on the media. Newton Media (previously media monitoring) occasionally publishes within its project *Medan.sk* some brief analysis mostly based on quantitative data. Ipsos MediaCT focuses on media market, media types, and media consumers behaviour.

Sources

Trade unions

- [Slovak Syndicate of Journalists](#) (SSN)

Journalists associations

- [Slovak Association of Journalists \(SAN\)](#)
- [Slovak Section of Association of European Journalists \(SSAEJ\)](#)
- [Slovak Syndicate of Journalists \(SSN\)](#)

News agencies

- [SITA](#)
- [TASR](#)
- [Me.cem](#)

Audience measurement organisations

- [Focus Agency](#)
- [IAB Slovakia](#)
- [Ipsos](#)
- [Median Agency](#)
- [Newton Media](#)
- [NMS Market Research SR](#)
- [TNS Slovakia](#)

Policies

Media legislation

The key media legislation is currently composed of Act No. 308/2000 on Broadcasting and Retransmission from 14 September 2000 (amended) and sister Act on Digital Broadcasting No. 220/2007 Z.z. (amended), as well as Act No. 167/2008 on Periodical Press and News Agency Services (Press Act) from 9 April 2008 (amended).

Act No. 308/2000 and Act 220/2007 are complementary complex legislation regulating the area of television broadcasting, radio broadcasting and retransmission of programme services as well as (partly) online broadcasting and audiovisual services on demand.

The Press Act as well as the Broadcasting Act guarantee to publisher, broadcaster and news agency respectively (and, thus, practically, to all journalists who are employed to have a contract with a publisher, broadcaster, or news agency) right to get truthful, in time and comprehensive information from public bodies. The Press Act, the Broadcasting Act and the Code of Ethics of a Journalist guarantee protection of information sources.

The Act of Broadcasting and Retransmission, first of all, underlines the importance of a micro level of media contents plurality closely connected to a meso level of media institutions (that are legally responsible for this) – plurality of information (§ 4 subsection 2 as well as § 16 subsection 3a as well as § 21 – right to reply – of the Act 308/2000 Coll.). Only later, the plurality at a macro level of media system is mentioned. This is tackled mostly in section 10 (Plurality of Information and Transparency of Media Ownership) and section 11 (Licence Awarding Procedure). The Act of Broadcasting and Retransmission actually deals with both horizontal and vertical media concentration/ownership, i.e. it understands a plurality of media contents in a broader way than just within an electronic/digital media system.

The Press Act deals first (§ 6 subsection 2 and § 11) with transparency of ownership (at a macro level of media system) but also creates great room for keeping the plurality of information (§ 7 Right to Correction, § 8 Right to Reply, § 9 Right to Additional Announcement) – a micro level of media contents closely connected to a meso level of media institutions (that are again legally responsible for this).

There are also following important legislative acts: Act No. 532/2010 Z.z. from 15 December 2010 on Radio and Television of Slovakia (amended). According to the law, the above unified organization is PSM which is defined as a national, independent, informative, cultural and educational institution, providing services to the public in the area of television and radio broadcasting.

Act No. 270/1995 Z. on State Language of the Slovak Republic from 15 November 1995 (Language Act, amended) and Act No. 184/1999 from 10 July 1999 on the Use of Languages of National Minorities (amended) are in part problematic. The strict language law seems to be a major objection for live television broadcast for minorities (with some exceptions). Obvious exceptions include special programmes in minority languages in PSM (but normally even these news programmes must have subtitles in the official language) or local radio broadcasting for minorities. There are also some 'common sense' exceptions enumerated in the law, such as, for example, foreign broadcast of Slovak Radio (SRo). A new version of the language law passed in 2009 (No. 318/2009 update to No. 184/1999 Law) complicated the situation in this regard to such a degree that, for example, the RVR (media regulator) had decided on its own initiative to discuss officially whether it amounted to breaking of the language law when an Englishman living in Slovakia said three sentences in English (not translated into the Slovak language) in a night discussion programme in the live broadcast of private television, *Joj Plus*, in December 2009. The verdict was that it was within the boundaries of the language law. Yet there was some liberalization of legislation too. For example, local and regional private radio broadcasters that broadcast for minorities are no longer required to translate their broadcasting into the state language. However, in spite of these liberalization efforts, language law is in practice, still seen as a major problem for TV live broadcast for minorities. Currently, it is possible to broadcast live television programmes in minority languages only with the immediate translation into the national language (in the past, before 1999, live television broadcasting in minority languages was practically impossible). There also is an option to broadcast in minority languages that are at the same time official languages of the EU. However, the broadcaster must have an exclusive licence of this type. Theoretically, this means that there could be live radio or television broadcast in Hungarian, Czech, German or Polish, Croatian languages (for so called recognised minorities) within Slovakia without any above mentioned limitations. Ironically, the largest minority, Roma minority, could not use this exemption (Roma is not official language of the EU). Similarly, neither Ukrainian/Russian and Jewish minorities could benefit from this exemption. This, as mentioned, does not mean that radio broadcast in PSM in minority languages and for minorities must be translated into state language either.

Also, the Parliament modernised the Law on the Use of Languages of National Minorities (No. 204/2011) in June 2011. This modernisation allowed, for example, the use of traditional geographical names in languages of minorities in media.

There is some other relevant legislation such as Act No. 68/2008 on Payment for Services to the Public Provided by the STV

and SRO from 15 February 2008 (amended), Audiovisual Act No. 40/2015 Z. z., Act No. 351/2011 On Electronic Communications (amended), Act No. 646/2005 On Protection of Some Radio and Television Programme Services and Information Society Services, Act No. 385/2008 On News Agency of the Slovak Republic from 23 September 2008 (amended), Act No. 212/1997 on Compulsory Copies of Periodicals, Non-periodicals and Multiplications of Audiovisual Works from 3 July 1997 (amended), Act No. 185/2015 On Copyright, Act on Advertising No. 147/2001 Z.z. (amended) and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) No. 211/2000 Z.(amended).

Additional problems with legislation are related to the boom of online versions of traditional media. For example, legislation does not solve an issue when court accepts some remedies in case of traditional media but this information (eg libel) is also present online or taken over by other online media.

There also is not quite a transparent regular and irregular policy of subsidizing minority and cultural press, including Hungarian ethnic minority newspaper *Új Szó*.

Some of these and other issues may be perhaps solved with the to-be-established Media Council. This Media Council should serve as an advisory body for the Government.

Accountability systems

In addition of the Council (Board) for Broadcasting and Retransmission (RVR, which deals with electronic/digital media and some online media, see below), since 2002 there is the Press Council of Slovakia (TRSR). It was established as a joint venture by the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists and the Association of Periodical Print Publishers in 2001. During 15 years of its existence it dealt with some 300 complaints in about 75 sessions. However, TRSR suffered at least two internal breakdowns during this period when it did not function properly for about a year in both cases - at a very early stage and in year 2015.

As a rule, TRSR is open to any complaint, either from a legal or natural person. A complaint can deal either with journalism ethics, or with barriers related to putting limits on freedom of the press or access of journalists to information. Moreover, the TRSR can initiate official complaints on its own initiative. TRSR has been considering to get involved into ethical issues related to online newspapers. The most frequent issues that TRSR deals with are impartiality, balance, objectivity, honesty, truthfulness and rigorous fact-checking. TRSR often deals with inconsistencies between, on the one hand, the titles of articles and their contents. Complaints on freedom to information access for journalists/media are less frequent. These are, however, much more publicly discussed issues (even before TRSR gets involved). For example, the Office of the Government and the Prime Minister Robert Fico refused to answer questions raised by journalists first from newspaper *Sme* and later from *Denník N* (when many journalists moved to newly established *Denník N*). The reasons were incorrect data repeatedly published about the prime minister as well as repeated unwillingness to publish corrections of incorrect data (however, this is dealt by a special law which specifies conditions when it is necessary and when it is not necessary to publish a correction). TRSR discussed both cases (*Sme* and *Denník N*), after receiving an official complaint in April 2015. TRSR has ruled that this decision was in breach of free access to information. TRSR issued statement to the Office of the Government breached freedom of the press (Decision 05/2015).

It should be mentioned here that this case is also before the European Court of Human Rights. Previously, it was submitted to the Constitutional Court of Slovakia. There the government based its defence in this case on two shaky arguments. First, there is a formalistic argument. The government says that this decision was not made in written form, it is not mentioned in the Minutes of the Cabinet and it was not even on the agenda of the Cabinet. Second, there is a political argument that this decision did not have any impact on the level of freedom of speech and press in Slovakia.

The Office of the Government selectively answers questions of established journalists too (Pancák, 2016). Finally, in late November 2016, the Slovak prime minister labelled some journalists as 'dirty prostitutes'. The exact quote is as follows: "Some of you are dirty, anti-Slovak prostitutes, and I stand by my words. You don't inform, you fight with the government."

We have mentioned earlier a major ethical/professional scandal among some of the media revealed by a local businessman. Clearly, the businessman did have his own agenda – he had been investigated by police and publicly criticised by Daniel Lipšic, former Minister of Interior, together with Gábor Grendel, then press secretary at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (and an MP during the scandal).

When this illegal tapping was done, selected transcripts of SMS and email correspondence between Gábor Grendel, press secretary, and later a politician (and a former TV journalist), and some well-known journalists in the past years, were published. In most cases, it was just a semi-official correspondence as usual. However, communication with two journalists stood out initially as ethically problematic. First, it was communication between Gábor Grendel and Lukáš Diko, editor of news in PSM. Second, it was communication between Gábor Grendel and Jana Krescanko Dibáková, a key political journalist from commercial TV JOJ. As calculated by Šípoš (2016), Dibáková had produced more than 50 reports about Grendel or Daniel Lipšic, the chairman of his political party NOVA since 2010, when Grendel changed sides and became a politician. However, Dibáková denied these accusations as misleading (see interview with Sudor, 2016).

In the case of Diko, the problem was in communication style (it was a bit vulgar, considering his leading position in PSM). The problem seemed also to be that he allowed others to communicate with him in a too pushy style. In addition, not only the style of his communication was problematic. The problem seemed to be his position within editorial hierarchy – he could easily influence content of broadcast of the main news of PSM television. However, clear evidence of direct influence on his editorial decision-making was not proven – on the contrary. For example, Milan Žitný, a security analyst (and himself a former journalist) stated that in spite of phone or SMS calls to block his appearances on PSM television, this actually did not happen. Neither the final official reports of both investigating committees did not find and breach of neutrality of the PSM news reporting.

Another interesting issue related to this scandal was the actual reaction of various media to the behaviour of their colleagues. Former media watchdog Gabriel Šípoš (2016) criticised that the most professionally ethical correct approach to the scandal was noticed only at the PSM. Lukáš Diko, the editor-in-chief of the News Department, took voluntarily "holiday" (see Diko, 2016) and two committees were established to deal with this issue (one established by the management, another one by the internal supervisory Council of RTVS). Other concerned media did not publicly provide official or unambiguous reactions to this scandal. It should be mentioned that also the Culture and Media Committee of the Parliament dealt with this issue and asked the Press Council to intervene (Jarjabek, 2016).

However, another media watchdog, Miroslava Kernová (2016c), as well as two editors-in-chief (Beata Balogová from *Sme*, Matúš Kostolný from *Denník N* and Zuzana Petková, deputy editor from business-economy weekly *Trend*, considered this case as not really worthy of serious debate. Petková considered it illegitimate to deal with illegal wire tapings. Petková (who was personally mentioned in the files) also mentioned that she checked data provided by Grendel with another source too (and also at off-the-record meeting), i.e. she did not rely on what one source claimed to be true. Kostolný believed that the journalists (mentioned in the files) actually did not say anything wrong in their tapped communication. Moreover, in his view, Slovakia is a country too small. In other words, it is inevitable that there are too close contacts among a limited number of professionals. However, he highlighted a need to establish more clear ethical rules for close contacts of journalists with politicians as well as a problem with a low number of senior editors in editorial offices who could more carefully supervise the work of journalists (especially with a focus on checking vested influences). Balogová accepted the discussion on this issue as

a legitimate one, but only as a long-term issue.

In the view of Kernová, what matters are real facts (real work performance) and trustworthy sources. Regarding the latter, in her view, this was not a trustworthy source. Kernová pointed to her earlier (2014) argument on the issue of making public controversial anonymous illegal tapings of communications. She compiled some discussion on this issue in her article. However, of all the issues to be considered in such cases *"is there a public interest or just public curiosity behind this issue? Is this fundamentally new information which was impossible to get in other way? Who is the source behind this, does he have any vested interests in making this information public? Is this conversation truthful? Is this a potential tool of manipulation of public opinion? Do we know all the context?"* she seemed to take just two of them as the most important ones: Why this particular information has been published and whether this was true or not. In other words, Kernová, as well as both key editors-in-chief (of agenda-setting newspapers) or deputy editor-in-chief mentioned above, did not really consider whether there was public interest (or just public curiosity) behind this issue and whether there was (or not) a fundamentally new information which was impossible to get in other way. Moreover, there was direct and indirect feedback from many concerned journalists that showed that SMS and email messages were, in fact, truthful, although illegal wire tapings. In other words, it appears that there are some controversial professional/ethical issues that editors and some media watchdogs do not take seriously enough. Moreover, both legal and illegal wiretapping is quite often used tool for discreditation in Slovakia and other new EU member states. In fact, the first illegally tapped communication of Grendel was made public already in 2014. Interestingly, although this was followed by a police investigation, no big public scandal or discussion erupted that time. Moreover, 2016 data indirectly confirmed that the 2014 data were – at least in Grendel's case – authentic (although a blogger may have had a fake identity). This is in contrast with an even earlier, major scandal in 2011, when another group of journalists was tapped, including their communication with another politician, this time from the left ideological spectrum.

Regulatory authorities

The main digital/electronic media regulator in Slovakia is the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission (RVR). There are some aspects of electronic/digital media regulation, which are under control of other authorities, such as the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and Postal Services (RU) that regulates issues related to the frequency spectrum, or Slovak Trade Inspection that regulates some aspects of the advertising in electronic media, but not the vast majority.

The RVR is an administrative authority *sui generis*. It is not part of the governmental administration and it is not supervised by the Government or a particular governmental authority. The Statute of the RVR explicitly mentions in its article 3 that the RVR is an 'independent organ', but it also defines the RVR, in the line with BA, as a 'nation-wide organ of state administration'.

The nine RVR members are elected by the National Council of Slovakia (the Slovak Parliament) that also approves the regulator's annual report and dismisses members of the RVR in case of specifically defined breaches of conduct (Article 9(2) of the BA). The members of the RVR are elected for 6-year terms with one third of the members changing every two years. The head of the RVR is its chairperson. He/she represents the RVR publicly and presides over its meetings that usually take place twice a month. Day-to-day business of the RVR is carried out by the Office of the RVR that has approximately 30 employees.

The Antimonopoly Office of the Slovak Republic (PMU) is an independent central body of public administration for the protection of competition. The PMU intervenes in cases of cartels, abuse of a dominant position, vertical agreements. Moreover, it controls mergers that meet the notification criteria. This is particularly related to acquisitions and mergers (in the case of media, mainly concentrations, vertical agreements and in one case abuse of dominant position on the market) and of various media publishers or media owners in general. The PMU is interested only in cases of evident abuse of dominant position of actors on the market.

One of the first decisions of PMU (2004/FH/3/1/021) related to the media dealt with acquisition by Ringier AG of tabloid newspaper *Nový čas* and weekly *Nový čas pre ženy* published by Gruner+Jahr Aktiengesellschaft a B.V. Tabora/ Druck-und Verlagshaus Gruner+Jahr Aktiengesellschaft a Rotenri Investments B.V. The acquisition was approved. The decision had 4,500 words.

The most recent decision (June 2016) was related to concentration. Penta Investments Limited together with Prvá slovenská investičná skupina, previous co-owner, took over Petit Press, publisher of the main agenda-setting newspaper (as well as some other media outlets).

A year earlier, the PMU (2015/FH/3/1/011) dealt with the highly sensitive acquisition by Penta Investments Limited taking indirect but full control over publishing houses Spoločnosť 7 Plus, a.s. (newspaper *Plus Jeden Deň*, weekly *Plus 7 dní*) Media Magazín, a.s., and Trend Holding, spol. s r.o. (business-economy weekly *Trend*). The decision counted 28 pages which suggests how serious the analysis behind it was.

Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and Postal Services – RÚ (previously Telecommunication Office). The RU manages the broadcasting frequency spectrum jointly with the Ministry of Transport, Post and Telecommunications. The RU updates plans of utilization of the broadcast frequency spectrum every two years in cooperation with the RVR.

The Ministry of Culture as the central body of the state administration prepares the basic concept of State media policies and most media legislation drafts. In the case of digital broadcasting, it keeps a public register of providers of content services in case there is a duty to register such services. The Ministry of Culture also keeps register of printed media, including ownership structures.

Sources

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Education

Universities and schools

Education

There is a continuous debate about the (by and large low) quality of higher education and social sciences and humanities research in Slovakia, and about its badly needed reforms. The Slovak higher education is rather closed and by and large an internationally uncompetitive system. Božák (2013) has noted that on the one hand, media studies in Slovakia have a generally negative public reputation (as a scientific field), but, on the other hand, this field of study is quite popular among its prospective students. This can be seen in a recent example. The Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava accepted 127 percent more students than it was planned. However, according to the Annual University Ranking (ARRA) 2015 Report, it achieved only five points for its scientific results (in contrast to top achievers with 76 points and 52 points respectively for scientific results). In other words, many students or their parents do not care about the reputation (quality) of their future alma mater. Moreover, Božák argues that media studies are by and large strongly based on theoretical approaches. This is a correct observation but not complete – theoretical approaches only rarely follow the most recent (rapidly developing) technological and legal developments in this field. In part, this low innovativeness is visible among many not very innovative topics chosen for final theses among or for students of journalism. However, occasionally, and perhaps surprisingly, one can find rather innovative research topics among younger generations of PhDs at the Catholic University in Ružomberok.

The rather bizarre nature of some educational and scientific activities among journalism schools in Slovakia can be seen in an invitation issued by the largest public entity involved in education of students of journalism/media communication, in Trnava in April 2017. The UCM school invited for its international "scientific" conference Tibor E. Rostas, a well-known editor of a major conspiratory journal published in Slovakia. Rostas was invited to participate in a panel discussion with the heads of editors-in-chief of key news departments in Slovakia as well as his paper was accepted for a separate lecture (entitled "Doubleworld"). While the first panel was transformed into "open discussion among all interested" - after the majority of editors-in-chief cancelled their participation in a protest, shortly before the conference (when the programme became publicly known and public uproar intensified), the lecture by the conspirator was still kept on the programme. The dean of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication bitterly defended her decision, arguing that the Faculty does not follow "mainstream" and that the conference is open to all who submit their application - without any "censorship".

The ARRA assessing the quality of university education suggests that the largest (and the only) public faculty (there also is a private faculty which was not included into this ranking) specialising in media studies in Trnava, has actually been put qualitatively constantly in the middle or at an average level in its category since 2012. However, in science and research it was among the worst performing faculties. Moreover, sometimes there is a problematic moral profile of some of its key academicians. As it is usually the case, low level of academic ethics in Slovakia is closely related to low quality of professionalism. Indeed, the Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava was identified as the top Slovak contributor to dubious "scientific" journals.

Research is closely linked to higher education research policy. It is simply impossible to finance de facto about 30 research universities in a country of 5.4 million inhabitants. This may explain why Slovakia was the second worst performing country among OECD countries with regard to dubious publishings of scientific houses and actually the worst in case of individual scientific so called predatory journals among OECD countries identified in Scopus database (although at a low level). Be that as it may, in the coming years a rapid decrease in the number of students is expected in Slovakia. This is actually already happening. Moreover, many students study abroad, especially in the Czech Republic. For these reasons, there are plans to specialise only some universities in research. The problem of universities is also partly related to the state's educational policy - in general, there is easy and free access to higher education. Currently, almost half of high school graduates continues in higher education, usually for 4-5 years. In addition to state policy of mass higher education, there is an "anti-intellectualism" of Slovak society, which also contributes to the by and large and comparatively low quality of education and

research in social sciences and humanities. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and its affiliated teams of experts have produced some far-reaching reform plans in higher education. These reforms are not exclusively related to journalism studies, but may impact them heavily too. On the one hand, there may be plenty of graduates (with bachelor's degrees) who will not understand the deeper legal and ethical issues behind their profession. Perhaps an older assessment - the November 2011 mini-survey of the SSJ among five leading professionals (senior editors and editors-in-chief) which revealed their almost unanimous dissatisfaction with respect to the quality of journalism studies in Slovakia measured by output- is still valid. These are the main complaints and at the same time expectations, with respect to journalism studies, graduates included: knowing how to write, how to talk, intertwining theory and practice, using independent and logical thinking, knowing how to identify the substance of an issue, checking and updating information and effective questioning skills. In the words of Beata Balogová, editor-in-chief of newspaper *Sme*, there are two problems in journalism. First, there is no longer a system of tutors in editorial offices (there are some tutor systems in PSM). Therefore, schools must produce ready-to-use journalists. Second, younger generations (not only of students or journalists) are impatient, so news must be more tailored. In general, these trends have produced more tabloid journalism and supported herd instinct trends among the journalists/media. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that those who would study for a masters degree in journalism, would get much better education either. Be that as it may, it appears that there is a need for more vocational journalism education at first level (BA) and some specialisation (in economy, industry, political science, law, etc, including specialisations such as international journalism reporting) later on (MA studies). The governmental plans intend to allow a liberal studies approach at BA level of higher education. The fuzzy approach discussed above of leading editors to some ethical/professional issues (scandal on leaked wiretapped SMS and e-mails) shows that there is indeed a need for more serious study of ethics in journalism.

Universities/Schools of Journalism

The first path to journalism can be seen in annual competition of high school students and their magazines, organised in four categories: among print and (since 2016 also electronic/digital magazines) edited by high school and university students and in categories of individual journalism achievements of high school and university students respectively. This competition is being organised for over two decades as *Štúr's Pen Competition*. Some respected journalists started their professional career here. So there is potentially a large pool of potential students interested in journalism/media.

The High School of Mass Media and Information Studies in Bratislava can be seen as a second and new step (maybe the final step, considering that there are no limitations on entering the journalism profession) on the path to journalism. This school has changed its curriculum and official name in 2014. It is the only such high school in Slovakia. However, there is a private Artistic High School of Animation in Bratislava that specialises mostly in animation programmes, graphic, photographic and clothing design, but also at image and sound production, camera and sound editing. Some other high schools run courses on media literacy and occasionally courses specialised in journalism too. It can be estimated that about half of high schools in Slovakia are involved in various media projects and activities (such as school magazine, radio/tv production or website).

The oldest Department of Journalism is at Comenius University in Bratislava. It was established in 1952. There are about 250 students. The Department of Journalism has undergone radical refresh of its staff in recent years, when majority of its members are pedagogical and scientific newcomers to the field. This may explain its relatively qualitatively low level of scientific output. For example, the top publication in the list of its publications for 2014 year stated contribution in a Slovak language published in the Czech journal "*Current reflection of the language culture level in the main news programme of RTVS*", category ADE. Only just one another contribution was published abroad at a local conference. Moreover, the Department publishes annually edited volumes that are usually focused on a single issue. For example, the 2015 volume [Žurnalistika, médiá, spoločnosť](#) (Journalism, Media and Society) focused on minority and the media.

However, there is occasionally some criticism of its management which may have impact on quality of education. The Department of Journalism acknowledges that the editorial offices demand practically orientated graduates, and allegedly keeps in line with curriculum of Columbia University in the USA. However, there are some occasional voices that question reality of this claim. The management of Department of Journalism publicly denies the lack of practically orientated training and opportunities to work during studies and provided a list of professionals who participate in practically focused seminars.

Twice a year, the Department of Journalism publishes (via the Association Mass-Media-Science) the oldest professional journal *Otázky žurnalistiky* (Issues of Journalism, since 1958). Although the majority of its articles is usually in the Slovak language, some articles are published in the Czech, English, German, French and Russian languages. The Comenius University incorrectly claims that this is the only such periodical in Slovakia. There are some famous graduates.

The public Faculty of Mass Media at University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava has hundreds of students of journalism and marketing. It has been established in 1997. It has four study programmes: mass media communication, marketing communication, media relations and applied media studies. Since 2010 it publishes twice a year the open-access journal *Communication Today* in English language. Moreover, it organises annual conferences on media and marketing. However, the output from these conferences is of rather low quality. For example, it was impossible to find any academically relevant and trustworthy article published in its 2011 volume *Media and Politics – Megatrends and Media* (edited by Magál), which could be useful for purpose of this study.

There also is a private Faculty of Mass Media at Paneuropean University in Bratislava. The Faculty was established in 2007. It is also divided into four institutes. It does not report on the number of its students. Moreover, it employs only a limited number of lecturers on a full-time basis. The Faculty is more focused at practical training. Nevertheless, since 2002, it publishes once a year a Slovak version (but some articles are in English) of *Global Media Journal*. Certainly, scientific research is not a priority - for example, in late 2016 it still promoted its research plan for 2015 and its last research projects mentioned on its website were from year 2010. A problematic aspect of self-assessment of scientific production by Slovak universities can be seen in two top publications produced by this Faculty in 2014. On the one hand, there is an impressive list of 136 publications and activities. On the other hand, a more detailed look suggested that their scientific value may not be that high. For example, the first top publication (monograph) was "*The value of a creator - portrait of a writer Milan Ferko*" (*Hodnota tvorcu : portrét spisovateľa Milana Ferka*), while the second (also a monograph) was a qualitatively controversial publication. Moreover, the second publication was actually a translation from Russian, written by a Russian author.

In addition, there is a private Academy of Media in Bratislava with up to 150 students. It is almost exclusively focused at practical training of journalists, but its educational focus is wider (includes marketing communication). This college faced serious financial problems since its establishment in 2006/2011 - actual opening of the first semester. In 2016, a new investor took over the management. There have been rather radical changes in its staff since its founding, sometimes with rather radical protest statements.

There is a Department of Journalism at the University of Constantine Philosopher in Nitra and a Department of Journalism at the Catholic University in Ružomberok, each with around 150-200 students. Be that as it may, the weekly *Týždeň* has established its own journalism course called "Media School" while providing justification for this move as "a step against too theoretical studies at universities".

The Department of Journalism at the Constantine Philosopher University was established as the second oldest department of journalism in Slovakia in 1995. Its research focus seems to be mostly on linguistic and content-related aspects of journalism and literary production. The department organised its first scientific conference in 2014. However, not everything produced by the Department seems to represent a science, although it claims to be so. The older volume (Antošová and Orban, 2012)

seems to be more a collection of mostly essays than of scientific contributions (regardless of having two reviewers). On the one hand, collection of contributions from a more recent scientific conference (Bútorová and Veverková, 2015), although mostly representing the Department itself, is of much higher scientific quality. On the other hand, a publication by Chlebcová-Heřková (2015) produced at this Department shows some serious academic deficiencies (regardless of having two reviewers, including from Trnava's UCM professor). First, Chlebcová-Heřková just named a few, but not logically structured related theories (pages 40-43). For example, the theory of lost politics (typical representative should be N. Postman) does not seem to be analytically different from the theory of colonisation of politics (Mayer) or even from the theory of political programme (Jarren, Dolgens and Artl). It would be more logical to categorise these theories according to their real or potential influence, eg categories of powerful media, powerful politics, mixed model, zero or limited influence of the media. Moreover, the author does not differentiate between some basic facts. For example, at p. 70 Chlebcová-Heřková writes: "The European Union is well aware about this fact. In Recommendation of the Council of Europe (1999/2005) it is written...". These are totally different bodies. Quite often there are no sources mentioned. For example, at page 71 "The Slovak Television, however, discussed in its discussion programmes Topic for the Evening, Night under the Lamp and Face to Face almost exclusively with topics already medialised..." or at page 73 "The Government of Slovakia has attempted to influence PSM: through elections of supervising councils, the directors general elected by the council up to phone calls to journalists." This is true in some cases, but there are no sources mentioned (this is similar at page 77 with discussion on political background of members of supervising Council of ZDF). Sometimes there is wrong information provided (eg "the last act (on PSM) has abolished supervising council", p.73). This is not true - there is still a supervising council for PSM. Sometimes there is rather informal language used ("*podpíli si vlastný konár*", p.74). Sometimes there is uncritical acceptance of official approaches and decisions. For example, Chlebcová-Heřková mentions at page 74 sanctions issued by the RVR to PSM television during the Russian Army invasion of Crimea for not giving a voice to the Russian side. One can wonder whether this sanction was actually justified. On the positive side, Chlebcová-Heřková used many sources in English and German languages and provided interesting and innovative charts based on Pajek software (connections in online communication) in her final case study.

Be that as it may, a short list of up to 30 of its "successful graduates" indeed suggests that even a relatively unknown department can produce some successful graduates – on average, two per year. However, a sceptic could argue that these famous graduates could become famous at any other university (and vice versa).

The Department of Journalism at the Catholic University in Ružomberok was established in 2000. By definition, education here should be specialised at the traditional Catholic media and Catholic or religious aspects of journalism. However, its scope of research is much wider. For example, a collection of essays and articles by Považan and Ronžáková (2015) includes topics such as photography, emoticons, hypertext, investigative journalism as a journalistic type, or corporate blogosphere. Qualitatively, these contributions were of a higher level than both Nitra UKF and Bratislava PEU schools of journalism, although most of them would have difficulty to get published in serious academic journals too. This is so since they rarely presented some new knowledge based on in-depth research, but rather seemed to resemble summaries of facts/knowledge. The Department of Journalism also was directly impacted by a major financial and moral scandal related to the internal management of the university and its faculties.

There also is a Department of Communication and Media Studies at Prešov University in Prešov with almost 150 students. Established in 1998, it specialises in semiotic/linguistic and discourse/literary aspects of journalism, pop culture, media representations, and more specifically, creative writing. This can be seen in a volume edited by Blaho (2015). Only a few articles dealt with journalism (eg *Speed of speech in commercial and PSM radb*, and perhaps one could include here another one - *Electronic mass media as an environment of slipstream: thoughts about functioning of mid-stream and periphery in pop-culture*). Moreover, the majority of articles were very short, with some 5-6 pages which can hardly be seen as sufficient for

scientific analysis. However, there is also some focus on electronic media, especially television news, pornography and culinary magazines (in Laurin?íková, 2016).

There are some departments or sub-departments that have very little to do with journalism but mostly deal with some aspects of communication. There is a relatively new (2007) sub-department at the Department of Slovakistic, Slavonic Philology and Communication of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice with 167 students and there also is a Department of mediamatics and Cultural Heritage at the Faculty of Humanities at Žilina University in Žilina (founded in 2011) with 174 BA and 101 MA students.

However, the latter department seems to be specialised in library and information sciences rather than in journalism. Indeed, the focus of Department of mediamatics and cultural heritage department is to provide students of library and information sciences some degree of information on media education. This is also reflected in its research focus (eg rather blurred topic *Need of multidimensional critical thinking in the media competence development* 2015- 2017), although some students are clearly interested in specific issues related to media and communication. For example, among final theses in BA study in 2014/2015, there were following topics included: *The Issue of Law Licences to Copyrighted Products in new media, Journalist in Regional Media, The Issue of Presentation of War in media, Media and Cultural Heritage, The Actual Issues of Copyright Law, Hoax as a means of Electronic Communication*.

The Department of Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage has four streams: visual communication (PC layout, photo, web design, SEO and copywriting), new media, management of information and cultural heritage. The Department publishes its own online specialised journal *Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage* (established 2014). Occasionally, there topics that are of possible interest to journalism studies (eg From readers to digital literacy, Information spaces, Efficient and Creative Writing) are published, although so far their quality is more similar to chapters from textbooks or lectures than to scientific articles. It seems that there also was a problem with internal conflicts between the Department and the Faculty.

The University of Constantine Philosopher offers study at the Department of Mass Media Communication and Marketing. One of its bachelor's multidisciplinary programmes is specialised on studies of mass media "with integrated study in French".

Finally, there is a media research center at the School of Communication and Media in Bratislava. It was established in 2008 with the aim to become a centre of excellence in media and communication research in Slovakia.

Professional development

There is no precise statistics available as to how many journalists there are in Slovakia. This is by and large related to the non-existence of a legally binding definition of a journalist. For example, Bre?ka (2010) estimated that the number of journalists was more than 3,000 in 2010. Školkay, Hong and Kutaš (2011, p.53) estimated this number possibly as high as 5,000. Depending on the definition of a journalist and the period in question, the correct number can be somewhere in between or even higher than the highest estimate (see below). For example, TV anchors (though not broadcasting or publishing anything original), commentators and even spokespersons can be seen as journalists, while cameramen or other technical staff members are usually not considered as journalists even by themselves.

Neither are available reliable studies about journalists themselves. For example, Bre?ka's (2010) study, although extensive, was non-representative, based on only 139 questionnaires returned (and in any case, it is already outdated). Slovakia is not part of Worlds of Journalism Study Project either.

However, we can indirectly identify where journalists work, based on available statistics. For example, the Ministry of Culture runs a database of registered publications. This database counts 11 daily newspapers, including one online-only and two in foreign languages (*Slovak Daily News*, *Buongiorno Slovacchia* - Italian daily with originally planned weekly supplement in English).

The database of the Ministry of Culture includes 650 journals for the general public (eg newspaper published by municipalities), almost 500 magazines for the general public and over 650 magazines for special groups of readers (eg [Acta Physica Slovaca](#)). We can assume that this list (possibly without “journalists“ working for magazines dedicated to special groups of readers) may represent as many as 2,500 journalists working for print media.

In addition, there are TV and radio stations. The Annual Report of the Broadcasting Board for 2015 suggests that there were 36 licences for analogue radio broadcast (and additional 14 for digital radio broadcast) as well as 76 licences for terrestrial analogue TV broadcast (and additional 141 for digital TV broadcast). Not all licence holders actually broadcasted, and not all licence holders produced its own television or radio programmes. One can estimate that there are perhaps 350 radio journalists and perhaps 500 TV journalists in smaller local and regional channels/stations. In addition, PSM RTVS employs about 1,000 (perhaps 130-150 can be counted as journalists), TV Markíza about 250 (perhaps 50 are journalists), TV Joj has around 200 employees (perhaps 40 are journalists), TA3 employs around 70 staff. There are some unregistered online media and journalists too.

In total, there may be indeed between 3,000 and 4,000 journalists and quasi-journalists working in Slovakia.

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- [Prešov University in Prešov](#)
- [University of Constantine Philosopher in Nitra](#)
- [University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava](#)
- [Žilina University in Žilina](#)

Traditional forms of communication

Summary

Sources

Conclusions

Conclusion

There is an interesting study that documents and compares the past 10 years (2006-2016) of media in Slovakia (Struhárik, 2016). The years 2005/2006 were typical with rather booming Internet websites, although only a quarter of the population had access to the Internet at that time. Significantly, *Nový čas* had double circulation than today (sold over 180,000 copies), while *Sme* had almost triple circulation than today (it sold over 75,000 copies). *Hospodárske noviny* noticed a decrease of its circulation by about one third in the last ten years (it sold over 18,000 copies in December 2006). One of the most popular private radio stations today, *Jemné* (then *Jemné melódie*), was established in 2006. In this context, it should be put on the record here that Netflix and Amazon Prime Video entered the Slovak market in 2016.

Political/ideological parallelism in Slovakia has rather unusual context. First, it is at a rather low and mostly non-transparent level, second, it is apparently emerging at a meta-level of the media-types as well as in online sector, and third, it is present more often (but still rarely) at an individual rather than at institutional levels. There is only one clearly ideologically self-defined newspaper, namely *Pravda*, while *Sme* and *Denník N* can be only indirectly identified as liberal-right newspapers. The leftist-nationalist parties and many of their voters see the key media as unfriendly at best.

Continuous decline of readership of newspapers, the financial crisis around 2009/2010 and a shift of audiences as well as advertising expenditures towards social media (and television) have led to complete change in media ownership structures in the key printed media sector since 2014/2015. Similarly to other countries, the most important local media have been purchased by local conglomerates, often associated with oligarchic business methods. These large business groups have their vested interest (cross-selling of advertisements or business with the state, especially in regulated sectors such as healthcare) that question traditional watchdog functions of the media. Although there are still some foreign media houses, the majority of the most important print media (including one nationwide full-format television and one nationwide news television) are owned or co-owned by domestic companies or the company owned by a Czech businessman/politician of Slovak ethnic origin. The exception still is also TV *Markíza* which is owned by CME Slovak Holdings B.V. (USA owners).

Some answers to market and technological challenges can be seen in November 2016 public announcement of cooperation among newspaper *Denník N* and weekly *.týždeň*.

In other words, in the last ten years, the media sector as well as media audiences have undergone rather rapid changes in its communication tools (shift from traditional media to digital media and especially towards new social media), in its ownership structure (from foreign players to local actors), as well as in possible threats (from politics to market pressure). Yet politics is still not definitely a minor or irrelevant player in case of PSM. The political/public discussion throughout the year 2016 suggested that a minor coalition party, the *Slovak National Party*, would like to control the PSM. Some voices from the major coalition party, *Smer-SD*, including the prime minister, clearly raised dissatisfaction with the PSM. Ironically, both a survey among the general public and a survey among some local observers mentioned in the introduction supported a feeling of increased independent and more professional (more trusted) coverage of PSM (regardless of already discussed scandal in which the head of the news department of PSM was involved).

The journalism schools have responded to these transformations with some hesitation, and more under market (including demographic factor - decline in number of prospective students) and industry/political pressure rather than under the influence of any other factor such as pressure from parents of prospective students. Moreover, there is clearly an emerging research and educational specialisation of various journalism schools. This specialisation can be seen as more practically orientated (Academy of Media), or mixed, but with prevailing theoretical approaches (all others). In general, if the quality of research output is an indicator of the quality of teaching, which usually is indeed a correct relationship, then overall the quality

of teaching of journalism is rather low.

We know very little about the journalists themselves. The available data are not trustworthy and are outdated. The organisations of journalists are either more preoccupied about internal minor issues rather than about more nation-wide issues (SSN), alternatively they are either very elitist (SSAEJ) or without any publicly visible activities (SAN).

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