“THIS IS WAR. YOU’RE PART OF IT.”

The conflict between mainstream and alternative media before, during, and after Ukraine’s Euromaidan

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I. Introduction
“This is war. You’re part of it.”
- Appeal of Ukrainian civil society organization to a group of international journalists

Albeit unintentionally, this appeal in February 2014 by a Ukrainian civil society organization to a gathered group of journalists from around the world sums up the interaction between Ukraine’s recent crises and the media. News media no longer stands separate from conflict. The nature of media has changed and news is no longer only the province of detached journalists who consistently remain above the fray of events. Instead, news has now become an integral part of the events they report on and journalists have become information soldiers, spreading the word of what is happening on battlefields and in public squares in new and unprecedented ways. But beyond these singular flashbulb events, media – especially news media – signifies a lot about a country’s changing political and cultural dynamics as well. In the compelling case of Ukraine, the fluctuating media landscape tells us more than just what happens when media and conflict are intertwined. Tracing back Ukraine’s media development and dissecting the shifting forces that have shaped Ukraine’s current information space uncovers and explains some of the deeper and more systemic changes we have seen since Euromaidan. Furthermore, applying a theoretical approach to this exercise helps to guide and underscore the findings.

In this paper, I will use the conceptual framework created by media theorists Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin to analyze Ukraine’s changing media landscape and to draw some larger conclusions about Ukrainian politics and society as it undergoes major reforms. I posit that the two most prominent forces that are shaping this information space are alternative and mainstream news media. Broadly speaking, alternative media is defined as media that is outside the scope of corporate or commercial media and is oftentimes tailored to a small dissenting or
marginalized audience. On the other hand, mainstream media is geared towards the mass public and is usually owned by either large private news conglomerates or the national government. Given these definitions of the two forces, Hoskins and O’Loughlin divide media fluctuation into three phases of “mediatization,” with the third phase being appropriation of alternative media by the mainstream. With this in mind, I argue that the third phase of mediatization is unlikely to occur in Ukraine because Ukrainian mainstream media is incapable of appropriating alternative media due to 1) the mainstream media’s underdevelopment and 2) the robustness of alternative media since the Euromaidan protests. However, based on recent developments, I will also argue that the Ukrainian government has shown signs of the third phase of mediatization.

II. Theory: The mediatization of war

As this paper looks at the macro trends in Ukraine’s changing media landscape, it is important to utilize a conceptual framework in order to organize and reaffirm my findings. The conceptual framework that I will use comes from Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin, two media theorists at the University of Cambridge. Their book War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War (2010) and their follow-up article titled “Arrested war: the third phase of mediatization” (2015) form the basis of this paper. Although their theories focus specifically on the intersection of war and media, I consider it appropriate for these sources to be used as a guide to understand Ukrainian media at large as well. I argue that this is because one can broadly call the situation in Ukraine since Euromaidan a sort of sustained conflict and struggle between different factions (i.e. government, public, Russia, etc.). Additionally, I chose Hoskins’ and O’Loughlin’s theories as my conceptual framework because I feel that their description of the changing dynamics of news media in recent decades is the clearest way of understanding the

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increasingly intricate and complex relationship between conflict and media. Furthermore, Hoskins and O’Loughlin are best for understanding the situation in Ukraine before, during, and after Euromaidan because their works clearly describe how conflict can serve as a catalyst for change in a country’s media landscape.

Hoskins and O’Loughlin base their theories on the idea of “diffused war.” Their account of diffused war refers to “a new paradigm of war in which (i) the mediatization of war (ii) makes possible more diffuse causal relations between action and effect, (iii) creating greater uncertainty for policymakers in the conduct of war.” As identified in their definition of diffused war, there are three axes to this conceptual framework: mediatization, causality, and decision-making, the first and last of which will be discussed in more detail below. Hoskins and O’Loughlin posit that the causes of war remain stable (i.e. territory, competing interests, control of resources, etc.), but “the way war proceeds – its justification, conduct, reconstruction, remembrance – is changing markedly, and it is these changes that the concept of ‘diffused war’ seeks to capture.” In this way, we can see that the intersection of conflict and media is an important – and arguably understudied – field of research.

Returning to the three axes of Hoskins’ and O’Loughlin’s theory, the first axis is “mediatization.” Their definition of mediatization is:

As a result of changes in the communications technologies available to news media, citizen media and to militaries themselves, media are becoming part of the practices of warfare to the point that the conduct of war cannot be understood unless one carefully accounts for the role of media in it. This is what it means to speak of war as mediatized.

Given this conceptualization of “mediatization,” Hoskins and O’Loughlin are careful to delineate mediatization from mediation. Mediation is “the concrete act of communication by means of a

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2 Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin, War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War (2010), 3.
3 Ibid., 3.
4 Ibid., 4.
medium in a specific social context. By contrast, mediatization refers to a more long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media’s influence.”

The interpenetration of media and warfare and the mediatization of war matter because views of the conflict and of the conduct of war are vital to the war itself in the current age. Additionally, they see mediatization as part of a long historical transformation in which “institutions and practices assume a media form.” Summing up their conceptualization of diffused war, Hoskins and O’Loughlin state that diffused war:

… has produced an emergent set of far more immediate and unpredictable relationships between the trinity of government, military, and publics. These are significantly engaged in an emergent kind of conflict – which we are calling ‘diffused war’ – that is immersed in and produced through a new ‘media ecology.’ War is diffused through a complex mesh of our everyday media: news, movies, podcasts, blogs, video games, documentaries and so on. Paradoxically, this both facilitates and contains the presence and power of enemies near and far.

Thus, their conceptualization of diffused war, while specific to war and media, informs our understanding of how media and conflict interact. Overall, Hoskins’ and O’Loughlin’s characterization of diffused war forms the basis of our understanding of current changing Ukrainian media dynamics amidst conflict, which is what we have seen since Euromaidan.

Three phases of mediatization

Hoskins and O’Loughlin argue that there are three phases of mediatization, or the increasing interpenetration of media with news events. The first phase is the broadcast era, which occurred primarily during the 1990s. The broadcast era was characterized by the dominance of “Big Media” such as the BBC, CNN, New York Times, and so on. News-making

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6 Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2010), 7.
7 The three phases of mediatization are ideal phases and do not occur in isolation in reality. It is important to note that there is often overlap between phases.
8 Dan Gillmor, We the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People, For the People (2006).
was entirely the jurisdiction of journalists and the economics of publishing and broadcasting created large institutions and powerful news networks. There was a strict top-down hierarchy of management and organization. “Unwieldy, yet highly tangible and easily scalable and quantifiable, Big Media’s success is instantly measurable in ratings and audience-share...”

Hoskins and O’Loughlin sum up the first phase of mediatization by saying, “Phase one was defined by a relatively contained media ecology of discrete, mono-directional media with limited scope for mass audiences to challenge a discernible and dominant Western mainstream media’s representation of warfare.”

The second phase of mediatization is called the “diffused era,” which connects more directly to their concept of diffused war. The diffused era started in the early-2000s and is characterized by mass access to the Internet and an explosion of new media technologies, resulting in a proliferation of original news sources. Hoskins and O’Loughlin claim that the meteorite known as “digital” hit the world and Big Media suddenly lost its grip on news production. They state that this digital revolution affected the “media jungle” and destabilized previous patterns of interdependence between the “big media beasts and little audiences.”

Hoskins and O’Loughlin write:

… the second phase of mediatization brought the new uncertainties of Diffused War. The connectivity of media of the mainstream and media of the self suddenly immersed citizens and elites … into digitally networked relations. There was too much content, too many representations, to be able to conduct comprehensive coverage of the relation between media and any ongoing war.

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9 Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2010), 16.
11 Ibid., 1321.
12 Ibid., 1325.
This phase is accompanied by rapid increase of user-generated content, citizen journalism, and alternative media in general. In this way, the second phase of mediatization can be described as a media landscape that is fragmented, over-saturated and over-populated, and chaotic.

The third phase of mediatization according to Hoskins and O’Loughlin is called the “arrested era,” which began around 2010. They say that, in the third phase, “the centre has adapted and come back even stronger. The mainstream is the media ecology again. User-generated content and its chaotic dynamics have been absorbed and appropriated. The mainstream has enveloped the extreme.”13 In the third phase of mediatization, the data deluge is less overwhelming. A good example of the third phase of mediatization is the New York Times’ “Watching Syria’s War.” This is a multimedia site that simply posts all the images it can verify – and all the ones it cannot, which come from citizens on the ground or various alternative media outlets both in-country and elsewhere. The curators of this site are willing to be transparent about how hard it is for mainstream media to fully verify anything in the context of war.

The third phase of mediatization connects directly with the concept of war or conflict in that Hoskins and O’Loughlin argue that this phase “arrests war.” They state:

[The third phase of mediatization] stops war from escaping – escaping unintelligibility, escaping mainstream coverage, and escaping the control of military commanders. … [Formerly outside sources] are drawn into the mainstream media ecology because it has re-asserted its function as primary channel of the world’s affairs. … War no longer evades the eye of the primary gatekeepers. The dynamics once deemed chaotic are now harnessed.14

As a result of the third phase, policymakers and military leaders have renewed confidence in the mainstream’s seizure of the current media ecology, and, therefore, they enter into closer relationships with it. This leads to new synergies between the mainstream media and the military in their appropriation of news events, and the media – once utilized to counter or challenge the

13 Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2015), 1321.
14 Ibid., 1321.
official version of events – is instead deployed to support it. “Whereas the second phase of mediatization was marked by a struggle by and between elite actors seeking the containment of so-called amateur media content, today the amateur combat image is more quickly absorbed and utilized as a weapon of propaganda and warfare.”

The third phase of mediatization also directly affects the role of alternative media and the citizen journalists as well, which will be discussed in detail in relation to the case of Ukraine. The potential of the citizen witness as a new historical actor is subverted, and the role of wire agencies such as Reuters, AP, and AFP has changed. Their objective previously was to create content through professional journalism, which other news sources purchased and repackaged.

“Now, they verify emerging online content, sifting the data mass produced by citizen-producers. … In the third phase of mediatization, the now-subverted citizen … is one who is more fully integrated into and appropriated by the mainstream: categorized, commodified, processed.”

Thus, overall, the third phase of mediatization is characterized by the mainstream media overcoming the fragmentation and disjointedness of the second era through its appropriation of the alternative media in order to reassert itself as the main source of information.

**Third axis: Greater uncertainty in decision-making**

Taking a step back from the three phases of mediatization and instead returning to the three axes of Hoskins and O’Loughlin’s conceptual framework, we now turn to the third axis of greater uncertainty in decision-making as a result of the emergence of diffused war. This concerns the ability of government, business, and numerous other organizations to make any type of key decision with any degree of certainty about the outcome. When public sentiment or general knowledge about a specific event or issue is unknown or if there are countless

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16 Ibid., 1335.
representations of events or issues, it is hard for governments and various major powers to gage those issues and make a well-informed decision, policy, or strategy. “There is a tension – a dialectic of technological development and social relations – which is producing ‘complex intersections’ that may appear as ‘flows’ but are more flux-like…”\(^\text{17}\) Communication flows used to be “on tap,” and people could decide which flow to tap into. Today, however, “communication is uniformly less linear. Flows can go from broadcaster to audience, and also back again…”\(^\text{18}\) Additionally, the leaking of a sensitive picture or a misinterpreted statement can spark international unrest, as an array of perspectives, opinions, and interests are suddenly brought into collision. This development is also affected by the speed of the flux of media and decision-making. “It is not simply that real-time or close to real-time reporting by journalists and bloggers can problematize [decision-making], but that decision-makers... will have to account for immediate communication feedback and build this in to their planning.”\(^\text{19}\) Thus, we can see that the emergence of diffused war and the phases of mediatization have a direct impact on other important players be they government institutions, businesses, or civil society groups by causing greater uncertainty and complexity in their decision-making processes.

**Summary**

Overall, Hoskins and O’Loughlin provide us with a comprehensive conceptual framework that helps unpack the macro-level changes to a media landscape. The three axes of their theory dissect the processes and effects of the fluctuating dynamics of media, which change in accordance with the advancements in access to the Internet and communications technologies. Hoskins and O’Loughlin show us that not only are media and conflict becoming more intimately intertwined, but that that interpenetration greatly affects the calculus of major decision-makers in

\(^{17}\) Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2010), 12.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 13.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 13.
a given society which depends on that mutable media ecology. While they speak to the context of war, I believe that these ideas apply directly to the case of Ukraine and that country’s recent sustained instability, to which we will now turn our attention.

III. The media in Ukraine: Before Euromaidan

Having established the theoretical framework through which we will view Ukraine’s changing media landscape, we will now chronicle the development and changes to Ukraine’s media sector throughout the years leading up to, during, and after Euromaidan, with special attention given to the tension between mainstream and alternative media.

Initial changes in the 1990s

Ukraine gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, which is when globalization was advancing rapidly with the advent of new technologies. Upon gaining independence, Ukrainians had to immediately redefine who they were in the context of a radically changing world. The old Soviet values systems, structures, and identities required alteration, but there was no agreement on what the new Ukrainian identity should be and how it should be represented in the media. These types of concerns clearly affected the new Ukrainian media in particular because, as many scholars posit, media is directly connected to a country’s creation of culture and national ideology.20 And thus, when one is in flux so is the other, especially in times of dramatic reform.

Marta Dyzcok, a preeminent Ukrainian media scholar, identifies three competing ideologies that pulled the newly born independent Ukrainian media market in three different and contradictory directions:

Some believe that the best way to move ahead was to embrace Westernization and push ahead with rapid market reforms. Others felt that it was safer to retain close relations with Russia and reform more gradually. A third view was that Ukraine needed to find its own path, draw on its own ideas and traditions, although there was no clear vision on what that was. Media representations clearly show these competing visions of identity.21

Because each of the three competing ideologies would rely on representation in the media, the endless debate on which path to take marred early Ukrainian media democratization and created a major obstacle for its development.

The first private television channel to be created in Ukraine was ICTV in December 1991 by the American-based company Story First Communications.22 At first, ICTV only received broadcast licenses on regional state-owned channels, but it quickly became the fourth most popular channel in Ukraine by showing Western sitcoms. In this way, ICTV represented the “cosmopolitan” and Western-oriented identity and was the first step on the path to a new and pluralistic media market.

Despite this first step, Russian media continued to dominate the newly independent Ukrainian market until the mid-1990s. It was not until the presidency of Leonid Kuchma that major reforms to Ukraine’s media took place. Kuchma ensured that freedom of speech was codified in the 1996 Constitution and the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Council (NTRBC) was created. He also issued a presidential decree in 1995, which removed the Russian Ostankino television channel from the country’s most powerful broadcast frequency.23

The most pivotal action that Kuchma took in developing Ukraine’s independent media was an aggressive program of privatization. However, the non-transparent manner in which this was carried out produced a “rather corrupt system where media suffers from both state and corporate pressures. Kuchma viewed media largely as an asset, and television was privatized much the

22 Ibid., 238.
23 Presidential Decree No. 296/95, 11 April 1995.
same way as everything else: certain actors were given privileged access, while foreign capital was allowed in, but limited.”\(^{24}\) But Kuchma did not allow for the privatization of the entire media sector. The most popular national television channel, UT-1, remained under state control. UT-1 “positioned itself as representing the state and its identity, and broadcast exclusively in Ukrainian. But innovations from the early 1990s disappeared and UT-1 returned to its Soviet-era flavor because senior management did not change.”\(^{25}\) UT-1 continued to produce important programming on culture and public service information, but it “lacked vision.” There was no guidance from state policy and UT-1 became known as the “channel with no image.” Once a private media sector emerged, it steadily lost audience share. In this way, UT-1 represented the “new old Ukrainian identity.”

Two major private television channels resulted from Kuchma’s opaque and blitz privatization process in the mid-1990s, but each presented very different visions of the future of Ukrainian media and identity. The first was Studio 1+1, which began broadcasting in October 1995 and which projected a cosmopolitan Ukrainian identity. “From the beginning it used only the Ukrainian language, and projected a hip, youthful image from the screen.”\(^{26}\) The second major new channel was INTER, which first aired in April 1996 and which projected the residual Soviet Ukrainian identity.\(^ {27}\) The primary language used was Russian, and the main evening news program was Vremya, which was produced by Russia’s public broadcaster ORT-TV. Much of the early entertainment programming was either Soviet-era classics or new Russian media products.

\(^{24}\) Dyczok (2014), 240.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., 241.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 241.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 241.
Thus, the initial steps of Ukraine’s independent new media landscape was marked by debate between competing ideologies, and a president who, while taking control of the market from Russian influence, carried out privatization in a way that did not solve the new country’s identity crisis and that would cause problems later on.

**The Orange Revolution**

A period of civil unrest following claims of electoral manipulation, the Orange Revolution of November 2004 to January 2005 serves as an essential point of reference for the development of Ukrainian media and particularly the tension between mainstream and alternative media. Censorship was intensified in Ukraine during Kuchma’s second term as president, and anger with the media was also a driving force behind the protests. Internet became the nearly exclusive portal for *samizdat* journalism, and websites made an “indelible impact by creating an alternative media voice that led to an increasing number of people to challenge the official line presented by the mainstream media and the Kuchma regime.”

Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, also summed up the sentiment around the novelty of the protests when he said: “… the Orange Revolution may have been the first in history to be largely organized online.”

During the movement, there was a convergence of open networks and rapid political change. Activists coordinated via SMS, and they developed an independent online media with website discussion boards for activists to share best practices and make detailed reports of election fraud. Therefore, on the whole, it can be said that the Internet and online media played an outsized role during the Ukrainian Orange Revolution.

Moreover, citizen journalism and anger with the mass media establishment played a key role during the Orange Revolution protests as well. “Citizen opposition journalism was central to

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29 Michael McFaul, “Transitions from Post-Communism” (July 2005), 16.
challenging Kuchma’s semi-autocratic regime and his self-censored mainstream media environment. Any narrative of citizen journalism in Ukraine must begin four years before the Orange Revolution in September 2000, with the high profile murder of opposition journalist for Ukrainska Pravda Georgiy Gongadze. This event was central to putting the nation on a track towards political change.”31 In addition to the lack of an arrest and conviction following Gongadze’s murder, there was a flurry of citizen journalism before and during the Orange Revolution. For example, in 2003, the popular Kanal 5 – now owned by President Petro Poroshenko – started when members of the opposition bought a small television station and developed it to promote a view independent from that being given by the media under Kuchma’s control. Kanal 5 was only available to 30 percent of the Ukrainian market, but it became well known for its drastically different views on the news compared to other outlets.32 Other important citizen journalism outlets that arose during the Orange Revolution include the newspapers Pravda and Obozrevatel as well as the website ProUA.33 Most of these were hybrids between citizen and professional media in the sense that they were predominately staffed by professional journalists but often received low pay or were motivated primarily by a desire to change the Ukrainian political landscape.

There were also a number of pivotal citizen organizations that drove the protests of the Orange Revolution and who relied heavily on both the Internet and on citizen journalism as well. Maidan, or a Legacy of Ukraine Without Kuchma Movement, was one of them.34 Launched on December 20, 2000, Maidan was a group of pro-democracy advocates who used the Internet as a tool to support their organization and who spread their message of democracy through alternative

32 Ibid., 10.
media sources. A second example is Pora, which translates to “It’s time.” Pora was led by well trained and technologically savvy activists who used the Internet as a major mobilization tool. They promoted the “active use of modern communications systems in the campaign’s management.”35

Generally, the clearest way pro-democracy messages spread throughout Ukraine was through grassroots means, and groups such as Maidan and Pora were the strongest link between the small percentage of Ukrainian elites who were online and the general public. These groups served as a way to both inform the public and were also a forum for activists to communicate and coordinate. However, Goldstein warns that if “… cyber-utopians offer a vision of non-hierarchical, direct democracy in the future, and cyber-skeptics see little value to more technology, the Maidan experience demonstrates a middle ground.”36 He goes on to explain that the Internet was clearly a “vital, multi-faceted tool useful for outreach, training, and awareness raising, as well as fundraising and marketing. However, it is also clear that central, top-down leadership was necessary for the success of its mission.”37 Thus, the citizen journalists and groups of activists who relied on the Internet were a pivotal force during the Orange Revolution, and the combination of top-down hierarchical structures as well as grassroots movements was central to the groups’ success.

Overall, the Orange Revolution is an important period to understand when looking at the development of Ukrainian media, and especially when analyzing the tension between mainstream and alternative media. Citizen journalism and dissatisfaction with the government’s control of the media were driving forces behind the protests of the Orange Revolution and were

37 Ibid., 15.
central in setting the stage for later clashes between the two media forces as well as between the government and the Ukrainian people.

**Mainstream media before Euromaidan**

The media landscape in Ukraine between the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan was dominated by the mainstream and relatively stagnant, with few changes occurring between the leaderships of Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych. In general, despite all being post-communist countries, the media market in Ukraine prior to Euromaidan had more in common with Romania, Bulgaria, and the Western Balkan countries than with Hungary, Poland, or the Czech Republic, and this section will explain why that is. In order to understand the changes to Ukraine’s media landscape during and after Euromaidan, it is necessary to be familiar with the situation as it stood prior to the start of the protests. A Democratic Initiatives Foundation study done between May 17, 2013 and May 22, 2013 found that 90 percent of Ukrainians got their news from television, 37 percent from local print, 28 percent from radio, and 21 percent from the Internet. In this way, the consumption of media mirrors many post-communist nations in that television dominates the landscape and Internet has limited popularity.

In regards to broadcast, Ukraine is home to 15 nationwide, non-satellite broadcast television channels. This is 2.5 times more than in Poland, which means there is more competition for advertising revenue and viewership. Six of the 15 channels have over half the viewership, and in general the Ukrainian news media is dominated by a few major channels, almost all of which are privately owned. INTER TV and 1+1 are the most popular private channels, but other popular ones include STB, Novy Kanal, ICTV, Ukraina, Kanal 5, and TV

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The largest state-owned television channel continues to be UT-1, recently renamed UA:First, which is only the seventh most popular television channel for news and has an audience share of only 3.39 percent.\textsuperscript{42}

Although the media landscape in Ukraine is heavily dominated by television, newspapers are also an important source of news for many Ukrainian citizens. Similar to the broadcast market, the top nationwide daily newspapers are also privately owned.\textsuperscript{43} 

\textit{Fakty i kommentarii} is the most-widely distributed newspaper, and \textit{Argumenty i fakty} is the second most-widely distributed and is the Ukrainian language version of the popular Russian newspaper, as is \textit{Komsomolskaya pravda v Ukraine}. Other popular newspapers in Ukraine are \textit{Segodnya} and \textit{Vesti}, both of which are distributed in Russian. \textit{Zerkalo Nedeli} and \textit{Vercherniya Vesti} are popular Ukrainian-language political weekly newspapers, and the \textit{Kyiv Post} is an English-language weekly newspaper and popular website, but its readership is mostly limited to Westerners and liberal elites.\textsuperscript{44} Overall, the native Ukrainian newspaper sector is underdeveloped, and the pressure from Russia can be seen most clearly in Ukraine’s newspaper market because of the popularity and persistent presence of Russian newspapers in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, pressure from Russian media is prevalent elsewhere as well. Russian television channels are still popular, especially in the eastern half of the country. Ukrainian broadcast channels prominently feature Russian serials, reality shows, gala concerts, soap operas, and comedy shows. Ukraine is different from comparable nations (meaning former Soviet bloc countries) like the Balkans or Poland because of the extraordinarily large scale of Russia’s presence in its media market.\textsuperscript{45} Russia’s influence is very strong, and it weakens the native

\textsuperscript{42} Ryabinska (2011), 8.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{44} Oliver Bullough, “\textit{Kyiv Post’s Unlikely Success},” Columbia Journalism Review (September/October 2014).
\textsuperscript{45} Ryabinska (2011), 12.
Ukrainian market and hampers its development. Which is particularly unfortunate because, given its population, Ukraine could have a large, dynamic media market.\textsuperscript{46} According to ZenithOptimedia, an advertising and public relations firm, Ukrainian television has the second largest (after Russia) audience in the region with 18.6 million viewers.\textsuperscript{47} “Before the global economic crisis began in the fall of 2008, Ukraine had the fastest-growing advertising market in Europe, which was expanding at an average of 30 percent per year and was becoming more and more attractive for investors, both domestic and foreign.”\textsuperscript{48} Western investment in Ukraine’s media has decreased dramatically since the years directly following the Orange Revolution.

Opposite the decrease in Ukraine’s traditional media market was the rise in Ukrainians’ use of the Internet and social media. However, overall, the level of Internet penetration in Ukraine is limited. According to the World Bank, only about 41.8 percent of the country qualifies as an “Internet user,” which is defined as anyone who has used the Internet in the last 12 months.\textsuperscript{49} This is a dramatic increase from the level in 2005, but even in 2009, Internet use in Ukraine was still 20 percent lower than the average European rate.\textsuperscript{50} According to one marketing study done in 2013, only 58 percent of Ukrainians (or 21.1 million people) went online at least once a month, and the most visited websites are: google.com, mail.ru, vk.com, yandex.ua, and youtube.com.\textsuperscript{51} While news is available in some form or another on most of those sites, not one of them is dedicated only to news media. Additionally, not only is Internet use limited in Ukraine, but it is highly concentrated in the cities. Nearly a third of all users live in Kyiv, and 75 percent of all users nationwide live in Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Kharkiv, and Donetsk.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{46} Ryabinska (2011), 5.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{50} Oleh Rovzadowskyy, “Media Landscapes: Ukraine,” European Journalism Center.
\textsuperscript{51} “Ukraine profile – Media,” BBC (2015).
\textsuperscript{52} Rovzadowskyy.
Also, there are a very limited number of Internet providers in Ukraine, with the partly state-owned Ukrttelecom being the main provider. Overall, it is interesting that Ukraine’s Internet media is limited and concentrated in certain groups, yet Freedom House classifies Ukraine’s Internet as “Free,” whereas the rest of the news media in Ukraine is classified as only “Partly Free.” In regards to social media in Ukraine, VKontakte (VK) is the most popular social media outlet, but Facebook is close behind. Twitter was the least popular before Euromaidan, but the number of Ukrainian users rose dramatically following the Euromaidan protests.

Turning now to the more institutional aspects of Ukraine’s mainstream media, after Kuchma worked to privatize the Ukrainian media, the landscape came to be centralized in the hands of a few Ukrainian oligarchs. “What distinguishes the Ukrainian market from the media markets in many other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe is the fact that the most prominent media owners in Ukraine are industrial and financial magnates with strong political connections. Their main interests are outside the media sector.” These oligarchs gained ownership of media companies through the blitz privatization that occurred in the mid-1990s under Kuchma’s oversight. As a result, three of the four media empires controlling most of the broadcast market in Ukraine belong to Viktor Pinchuk, Rinat Akhmetov, and Igor Kolomoysky. Viktor Pinchuk is the founder and main owner of one of Ukraine’s leading steel industry groups, and he is the owner of four national channels including ICTV, STV, Novy Kanal, and the M1 music channel. He is also the owner of the largest circulation daily newspaper Fakty i kommentarii. Rinat Akhmetov is a coal and steel magnate and the country’s richest man. He owns the television channel Ukraina, the national daily newspaper Segodnya,

54 Rovzadovskyy.
and a number of local media outlets in the Donbas region.\(^{58}\) He also runs the largest media empire, Media Group Ukraine, which includes nine television channels, a production company, and the media holding Segodnya Multimedia. Igor Kolomoysky is the leading partner of a banking and industrial conglomerate engaged in steel, chemical, and energy industries. He owns the popular station 1+1 as well as TET and Kino channels.\(^ {59}\) He also owns several newspapers and magazines, and he is co-owner of the UNIAN news agency. He runs the media holding company Glavred, which is home to several popular Internet sites and news outlets. Renowned Ukrainian media scholar Natalya Ryabinska sums up the consequences of this highly centralized ownership by saying:

Ironically enough, although private ownership is considered an important condition for the independence of the media, the process of media appropriation by large financial-industrial groups in Ukraine was accompanied by a reduction in their autonomy and freedom. Ukrainian ‘big fish’ began to seize portions of the media market in the mid-1990s. By 1995, interest groups that had both administrative decision-making power and economic resources began to emerge. Their economic power was consolidated through the large-scale privatization process conducted by President Kuchma. Ukrainian oligarchic clans also gradually gained ownership or control in the media sector.\(^ {60}\) And so, one of the most prominent characteristics of the Ukrainian media landscape that has stifled its development is the high level of oligarch-owned private media and the consequences that follow. One interesting oligarch of note is the current president, Petro Poroshenko, who also has many media holdings. When he became president, many believed that he should give up his media ownership rights, which he declined to do and which goes to show how closely media and politics are intertwined in Ukraine.

Connected to the dominance of oligarchs in Ukraine’s media market is the legislative and political sphere that also affects Ukraine’s media landscape. A report of the Moscow Media Law

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\(^{58}\) Ryabinska (2011), 7.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 9.
and Policy Institution in 2007 states that Ukrainian media legislation is the second most
developed from the standpoint of legal guarantees of mass media freedom among the countries
of the former Soviet Union, including the Baltic states.\textsuperscript{61} There are a number of legal
organizations that were created to regulate and protect Ukraine’s media, such as the National
Television and Radio Broadcasting Council (NTRBC).\textsuperscript{62} The NTRBC was created in 1994 as a
public regulatory body with a remit to supervise broadcasters and grant licenses. Its tasks include
participating in the formulation and implementation of state policy in the information and public
industries, analyzing and forecasting the trends in Ukraine’s information space, controlling
markets of print, television, and radio production, and coordinating state media.\textsuperscript{63} However, from
its early days, the NTRBC was accused of “manipulating the procedures for awarding and
canceling television and radio licenses to further the political and economic interests of its
members or the political groups backing them,” and the NTRBC was claimed in 30 lawsuits filed
by journalists in the year 2002 alone.\textsuperscript{64}

In regards to legislation approved by the Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, libel was
decriminalized in 2001, and in 2009 the Supreme Court instructed judges to follow the civil libel
standards of the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights, which grants lower levels
of protection to public officials and clearly distinguishes between value judgments and factual
information.\textsuperscript{65} However, in mid-January 2014, proposed by two members of Yanukovych’s Party
of Regions, the Rada passed a series of draconian laws that recriminalized libel, required
Internet-based news outlets to obtain registration or otherwise face steep fines or closure, and

\textsuperscript{61} Ryabinska (2011), 13.
\textsuperscript{62} Peter Gross and Karol Jakubowicz, \textit{Media Transformations in the Post-Communist World: Eastern Europe’s
Tortured Path to Change} (2013), 36.
\textsuperscript{63} Olge Shynkarenko, “Ukrainian Media After Euromaidan” (November 2014).
\textsuperscript{64} Ryabinska (2011), 14.
restricted the independence of media regulatory bodies. This was repealed on January 28, 2014 in a concession to the Euromaidan protests, but nevertheless it shows the antagonistic attitude that many members of the Rada and government officials have toward the Ukrainian media, especially alternative media. Moreover, corruption is a well-documented problem across many sectors of Ukraine’s government and legislation. In general, Ukrainian private media has to operate amid legal uncertainty and disregard for the rule of law. Additionally, the murder of Georgiy Gongadze, the *Ukrainska Pravda* journalist who was killed on September 16, 2000, remains unsolved. Ryabinska explains the situation regarding Ukrainian media law as follows:

A specific feature of the Ukrainian media market and the environment in which it exists is a profound disregard for the rule of law. As a result, although Ukrainian media law is considered to be rather liberal and well developed, it does not ensure the independence of commercial media and protect them from political pressure. Ukrainian legislation contains such advanced elements … but the democratizing effect of these laws is hampered by serious enforcement problems. Ukraine’s media laws and regulations are routinely violated by state officials, by media regulatory bodies, and by private media enterprises and their owners.

In this way, we see that the disregard for the rule of law further debilitates the Ukrainian mainstream media and does not work to create a healthy media ecology within Ukraine.

**Summary**

In sum, the media in Ukraine before Euromaidan is characterized by an early predominance of Russian media (that continued into the time leading up to the Euromaidan protests), an uncertainty about what Ukraine’s future media markets should look like as the country gained independence, an opaque period of privatization which resulted in the centralized ownership of the mainstream media in the hands of a few oligarchs, and limited Internet penetration. Additionally, this period was dominated by broadcast news media, mostly owned by the oligarchs, and legislation that did not protect the many media freedoms laid out in Ukraine’s

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67 Ibid., 15.
laws. However, there were some early periods of hope for a pluralistic and democratic media landscape in Ukraine, particularly with the Orange Revolution which saw an outbreak of citizen journalism and alternative media rise to the forefront, as well as the growth of Internet use in Ukraine. But, overall, the early period of Ukrainian media can be described as stagnant, stifled, and underdeveloped with limited space for alternative media.

IV. The media in Ukraine: Euromaidan and the rise of alternative media

With the wave of demonstrations and civil conflict that started on the night of November 21, 2013, Ukraine’s media landscape was changed. Protests followed President Viktor Yanukovych’s rejection of an EU association agreement, and protestors called for Yanukovych’s resignation. The protests climaxed in mid-February 2014 and involved violence on the part of the Berkut, or special police forces. Yanukovych fled Ukraine in late-February 2014, and a new government was later formed with Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Prime Minister and Petro Poroshenko as President. During this period of political change, the media in Ukraine shifted and tensions between alternative and mainstream media rose.

Role of social media

Euromaidan essentially began as a media event following a Facebook post by Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayyem. On November 22, 2013, he wrote, “Let’s be serious. Who is ready to come out at Maidan today till midnight? ‘Likes’ will be disregarded. Only comments under this post with the words ‘I am ready.’ As soon as there are more than a thousand people, we will be organizing ourselves.” Following this initial post, Facebook then became the main medium for coordinating events and activities among the activists and their supporters.68 Dozens of pages

were created, and “for the first time, Facebook became not only a social network full of rumors and opinions, but a place where people disseminated truthful information in an ocean of conspiracy theories and blatant propaganda.” In general, Facebook was perceived to be a more serious space for discussion about Euromaidan than VKontakte was. An official Euromaidan Facebook page was created immediately after the first pro-European rally and garnered more than 76,000 subscribers in the first eight days, which was a new record for the Ukrainian Internet. Twitter was not the most popular form of social media prior to the start of the protests, however many people joined Twitter in the first few days of the protests, and popular individuals such as former-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko gained millions of followers almost immediately after she was released from jail in February 2014.

Overall, social media became the main way of connecting people not present to firsthand accounts of the activities at Euromaidan. Ukrainian social media specialist Oleg Shynkarenko sums up this idea well in saying:

Euromaidan was a second Ukrainian revolution. … It was, at the same time, the first Ukrainian revolution scrupulously documented in thousands of amateurish YouTube videos and live broadcasts. It was the first revolution when the official state and commercial media did not have any significant influence on the people, creating opportunities and space for independent media individuals and small crews to address a millions-strong audience at once. … The only way to learn the truth about Yanukovych was through Internet and social media.

So, in this way, we can see that the Internet and social media played a crucial role in changing the complexion of Ukraine’s media landscape during the period of the Euromaidan protests. By providing a secondary source of direct and immediate news, social media paved the way for the rise of a robust alternative media in Ukraine during and after Euromaidan as well. Before turning

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69 Shynkarenko, 2.  
70 Ibid.  
71 Daniella Peled, “Ukraine’s Social Media Revolution,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting (March 2014).  
72 Shynkarenko, 2.
our attention to that rise, some interesting developments occurred in the Ukrainian mainstream media, which further undermined its role in Ukrainian politics and society.

**Mainstream media during Euromaidan**

Overall, the mainstream media lost some of the sense of legitimacy and trust held by the Ukrainian public prior to Euromaidan. Mainstream media broadcast channels often contradicted themselves. For example, in July 2013, INTER TV actively promoted the European integration agenda and broadcasted disparaging cartoons of Putin. A few months later in October 2013, the same channel claimed that “no one in the EU wanted Ukraine” and that “maintaining friendly relations with Russia should be the priority.” Similar instances on other channels were well documented and worked to make the mainstream media seem less trustworthy. Throughout the protests, Kyiv-based media watchdog Telekrytyka expressed alarm that oligarch-owned television channels were manipulating information. “What the oligarchs preferred to keep silent about were, firstly, the commentaries, critiques and propositions made by European and world leaders on how to settle the political crisis in Ukraine.” For example, following police clashes with protestors on the night of December 11, none of the major oligarch-owned channels aired critical reactions to the events from Western politicians, such as the statements from Lithuanian President Daive Gribauskajte, which condemned the government’s actions. Moreover, oligarch-owned mainstream channels tended to silence the activity of Ukrainian opposition parties and the repressive measures taken by the government against them and the Maidan protestors. All of these observations are underscored by a quantitative content analysis of television news done by

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74 Dovzhenko.  
75 Nikolai Kuzyakin, “Как телеканалы разрываются между Майданом и властью,” Media Sapiens (December 2013).  
77 Ryabinska (2015), 8.
the Academy of Ukrainian Press. The results demonstrate that, in December 2013, the share of airtime in news programs dedicated to members of the ruling coalition was 3.1 times greater than time given to the opposition.\textsuperscript{78} Misrepresentation and underrepresentation of the protests continued until the end of the movement, and mainstream viewership declined over the course of months. “… it became clear that the various oligarch-owned television channels were no longer uniform or consistent, but increasingly divergent in their coverage of the Maidan protests.”\textsuperscript{79}

Additionally, there were a number of dissident activities by professional journalists during Euromaidan, which further undercut the mainstream media’s position. These actions are “dissident” in the sense that they were actions taken that were beyond the direction or scope of the journalists’ official media outlets. “The civic and democratic ethos of Euromaidan brought new impulses into the resistance against media manipulation. Journalists made their position clear: they did not want to be merely the loyal servants of the political, economic, and personal ambitions of tycoons and powerful state officials.”\textsuperscript{80} For example, on February 21, 2014, several employees of the National Information System, owned by the oligarch Dmytro Firtash and the right-leaning politician and Yanukovych’s former chief of staff, Sergey Lyovochkin, appealed to their management with an open letter declaring disagreement with the company’s editorial policies.\textsuperscript{81} The letter was signed by 16 journalists, editors, and cameramen, and they argued that the news programs had turned from being “only” pro-state power into being an overt propaganda tool, distorting facts and lacking balance. The signatories demanded a return to journalistic standards in covering events on Euromaidan and in the regions without fear and fact-avoidance.

\textsuperscript{78} “Monitoring of the most popular TV channels,” Academy of Ukrainian Press (September 2013).
\textsuperscript{79} Ryabinska (2015), 12.
\textsuperscript{80} Shynkarenko, 5.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 4.
Another example of the “dissident” activity by professional journalists was the peaceful raiding of Yanukovych’s mansion. The raiding of the mansion, known as Mezhyhirya and estimated to have cost $100 million to build, involved cooperation among more than a dozen professional Ukrainian journalists from several different news organizations. The group dried and scanned a trove of documents that Yanukovych left behind after he fled and which were found in the large reservoir at the edge of the mansion. They set aside analyzing the documents themselves or fighting for a scoop in order to ensure that the papers were preserved and published for the world to see. The dissident journalists separated each wet page and laid them out to dry, taking a photo of each document and enlisting the help of archivists and librarians who brought special heaters to dry the documents. The journalists then created a website called Yanukovych Leaks to collectively published what they gathered.

These and several other instances of “dissident” professional journalist activities further served to undermine the legitimacy of the mainstream media in the period directly before, during, and after Euromaidan. By acting outside the direction of their editorial boards, they exposed the internal dissent that was occurring between mainstream media companies and their on-the-ground employees. Furthermore, the inconsistent and biased coverage of events at Euromaidan and the purposefully limited airtime that opposition figures received on mainstream media caused the Ukrainian public to lose faith and trust in the oligarch- and government-owned news.

**Rise of alternative media**

As the mainstream media was being destabilized and weakened (mostly by its own hand), alternative media flourished during Euromaidan. Beyond the direct connection to the protests

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82 “In pictures: Inside the palace Yanukovych didn’t want Ukraine to see,” The Telegraph (March 2014).
83 Yanukovych Leaks National Project (yanukovychleaks.org).
that Ukrainian citizens got through the increased use of social media, other new alternative media outlets provided their audiences with a point of view outside of the mainstream oligarch-owned or government-controlled perspective.

The most popular alternative media during the Euromaidan protests was Hromadske Telebachennya, or Public Television. Hromadske TV is a joint project of some famous Ukrainian journalists who attempted to create a new public media outlet independent of the mainstream media.\(^{84}\) It was launched in the summer of 2013 as a non-profit, volunteer-run NGO project and initially operated as a YouTube channel. Their task was defined as promoting “objective and unbiased information about important political, economic, cultural, and social processes, uncensored and broadcast only in accordance with the principles of public editorial policy under transparent funding and reporting.”\(^{85}\) Hromadske TV is funded mostly by donations with some foreign grants. According to its Interim Financial Report in the first quarter of 2014, “Hromadske TV was funded by individual contributions (1,408,324 UAH), auctions organized by Dukat Auction House (207,402 UAH), and the U.S. Embassy (287,898 UAH)…”\(^{86}\) Because Hromadske TV is crowd-funded, its journalists are not limited in their work by any advertisers or other sponsors, as most of the contributions are made anonymously by people who cannot influence editorial policies. It has moved from being just a simple YouTube channel to a now very popular website that live-streamed the majority of events and speeches at Euromaidan. For many Ukrainians, it became the main means by which they followed the protests and events in Kyiv and other major cities. There were also numerous other popular independent streaming services that were widely used by the Ukrainian public during the events at Euromaidan including Espresso TV.

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\(^{84}\) Shynkarenko, 8.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., 8.
A second example of a popular new alternative media source is Radio Aristokraty. This Internet radio station was started by two radio correspondents who worked for other outlets but felt that their coverage of Euromaidan was not sufficient. The station was entirely self-funded, and the two creators had to sell furniture to pay for equipment, which they set up in a friend’s basement. Radio Aristokraty’s popularity skyrocketed during Euromaidan, and it has grown to include 20 shows and a staff of about 30 people.

A third example of the robustness of Ukraine’s alternative media during Euromaidan is Ukrainska Pravda. This is the outlet that Georgiy Gongadze founded, and it is well known as a dissident and liberal news source. Regardless of its reputation before Euromaidan, it became the most popular website for news information during the protests. On one day in February 2014, 2.5 million people visited the site, and as of April 2016 it averages around 1.5 million visitors daily. Ukrainska Pravda is an independent news source run by professional journalists but is not owned by any major media company.

Beyond the individual new independent media outlets that arose during the protests, there were also interesting media centers and aggregators that became integral during this time. The most prominent example is the Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC). UCMC was set up in March 2014 to “provide the international community with objective information about events in Ukraine and threats to security, particularly in the military, political, economy, energy and humanitarian spheres.” During Euromaidan, this organization provided media support on a 24/7 basis to all those covering events in Ukraine and served as a sort of communications hub for news on Euromaidan. Currently, it has an online stream on YouTube, which shows press briefings from around the world, and has many projects including an interactive map and chart

88 Peled.
89 Ukraine Crisis Media Center (uacrisis.org).
that show shelling of Ukrainian armed forces by Russian-backed separatists in the anti-terrorist operations (ATO) zone each month. UCMC is funded by such entities the European Endowment for Democracy, National Endowment for Democracy, Nestle, the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, the German Marshall Fund, and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.90

Based on these examples, it can be said that alternative media in Ukraine grew in strength during Euromaidan, whereas the mainstream media suffered due to its inconsistent or biased coverage and the “dissident” activities on behalf of mainstream journalists. Along with those mentioned above, there were numerous other alternative media sites that grew rapidly in popularity during the Euromaidan movement.

V. The media in Ukraine: After Euromaidan, war with Russia

After the dramatic changes during the Euromaidan protests, attention in Ukraine – and the world – turned to the Donbas region in Ukraine’s east. While the annexation of Crimea was the precursor to the war in eastern Ukraine, the changes to Ukraine’s media landscape were minimal during that short period of time, and therefore discussion of Crimea has been purposefully excluded from this paper. After the annexation of Crimea, tensions in the region began in March 2014 when demonstrations by pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian groups took place in the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts of Ukraine. It escalated into an armed conflict between the separatist forces in the self-declared Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics (DPR and LPR) and the Ukrainian national military and government.

A key struggle in this fight has been over control of the media. Russian-backed separatists took over local broadcasting facilities in the beginning of April 2014 as they seized control of large parts of the two oblasts, and transmission of Ukrainian channels was replaced with pro-

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90 Ukraine Crisis Media Center (uacrisis.org/about).
Kremlin channels from Russia. The year’s Euromaidan clashes and warfare in the east made Ukraine one of the world’s most difficult and treacherous places for journalists to carry out their work. According to the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), a Ukrainian non-governmental organization, there were at least 995 documented violations of free speech in 2014, double the number of 2013 (496) and triple that of 2012 (324). Five journalists and two media workers were killed in 2014, and there were 286 documented physical assaults on journalists. The largest numbers of assaults actually occurred at the Euromaidan protests, and the frequency gradually declined but remained high. In fact, the IMI had to create a new category for their metrics because 78 journalists were abducted and illegally detained by a variety of actors including pro-Ukrainian and separatist combatants, 20 of which took place in Donetsk. Moreover, many journalists were internally displaced and additional restrictions on press freedoms during 2014 included barring press access to public buildings or meetings, physical attacks on editorial offices, and cyber attacks on websites including Glavnoe, Gordon, and UNIAN.

**Mainstream media on the war in eastern Ukraine**

The primary way that the war in eastern Ukraine has affected the mainstream media is that professional Ukrainian journalists have been struggling with how to conduct themselves in a war where the media plays an outsized role. Inside the newsroom of 1+1, Ukrainian flags signed by soldiers hang on the walls, spent shells rest on bookshelves, and on the floor lay fragments of the ruined Donetsk airport. Aleksandr Tkachenko, chief executive of 1+1 Media, said journalists have found themselves “participants in a war. Not physically, but a new type of war.”

Journalists in Ukraine constantly debate whether they can help Ukraine without contradicting

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93 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
their professional standards. “Ukrainian journalism is undergoing a crisis of values,” said Olga Chervakova, a television journalist-turned-politician who now sits on the parliamentary Committee for Freedom of Speech and Information. As a result, more often than not, Ukrainians are choosing patriotism over professionalism. Illustrating this concept, Andrei Tsaplienko, a war correspondent at 1+1, said remaining above the fray is close to impossible. Parallel with his journalism, Tsaplienko has begun collecting and delivering aid to the front. He is quoted as saying, “Here I understand that I can help.”

Threats to Ukrainian journalists from separatist forces have made travelling to Donetsk and Lugansk too dangerous for most. As a result, news reports are often one-sided and lump together all residents of rebel-held areas as “terrorists.” According to Nataliya Gumenyuk of Hromadske TV, generalizations such as these prevent Ukrainian audiences from truly understanding the crisis. In that vein, news-feeds of online publications usually consist of reports from two or three press agencies since finding and writing an outlet’s own stories has become too dangerous and expensive. “The nihilistic spirit… has long since put down roots in Ukraine’s media space in its fertile soil of miserliness, passivity, and thoughtlessness. The Russian mantra of ‘why check the facts when truth doesn’t exist’ has turned into ‘why check the facts when my wages are 200 dollars a month.’”

Finally, major media companies still privately own most media in Ukraine, which has not helped the mainstream media to gain trust and viewership since Euromaidan. According to the NTRBC, at the end of 2014 there were 1,563 valid broadcast licenses in Ukraine, of which 1,229 were held by private stations, 298 by communally owned broadcasters, and 36 by state

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97 Ibid.
98 Dovzhenko.
99 Ibid.
broadcasters.\textsuperscript{100} Despite a bill proposed in February 2014 that would require outlets to disclose more information about it, media ownership remains nontransparent in practice. It is widely understood that most of the sector is still controlled by a small number of wealthy businessmen with interests in politics and other industries.\textsuperscript{101}

Moreover, there has been a sort of “war” among the oligarchs since Euromaidan. “Having shaken off Maidan, the oligarchs continued as if nothing has changed, divvying up property and spheres of influence.”\textsuperscript{102} Igor Kolomoysky was seen as the “hero” of the post-Euromaidan period and was appointed governor of Dnipropetrovsk. He also became a generous sponsor of Ukrainian nationalist volunteer battalions. Dmytro Firtash, the business partner of Serhiy Lyovochkin (Yanukovych’s former chief of staff), announced his willingness to take part in the “rebirth of the country,” but he also offered support to pro-Russian forces. A coalition was formed of anti-Kolomoysky oligarchs, and their intention was to destroy his reputation, damage his businesses, strip his team of government officials, and block the appointment of “his” people to the Verkhovna Rada.\textsuperscript{103} This political infighting amongst media owners greatly affected their respective outlets because “… the war between the oligarchs narrows the field of information. Journalists choose stories and information according to the interests of their publications’ owners.”\textsuperscript{104} Chief editor of Telekritika, Natalya Ligachyova, stated, “Television still lacks the resources able to provide otherwise unreported facts and independent expert opinion to the biased information on both sides, which could help audiences gain a proper perspective on

\textsuperscript{101} Joseph F. Dresen, “Media in Ukraine: A Domain of the State, the Oligarchs, or the Public?” (2011).
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Dovzhenko.
what’s going on." As a result, standards of professionalism and veracity of reporting have continued to decline due to the divided attention and loyalties of media owners in Ukraine.

Thus, overall, the fact that the oligarchs still own the majority of private mainstream media in Ukraine is compounded by their political infighting and the ramifications that has on the news media that they own. While private media ownership in most countries is a guarantor of plurality and diversity in a media market, the owners of most media holdings in those countries do not usually have multiple focuses on financial and business interests outside of the media sector, and furthermore, they do not normally have as close of political connections as we see in Ukraine. With the oligarchs’ attention further divided and focused outside the interests of a healthy media ecology, mainstream media since Euromaidan continued to weaken. Moreover, the professional standards of mainstream Ukrainian journalists have been called into question by the fighting in the east, further undermining Ukraine’s mainstream media.

More alternative media focused on war in eastern Ukraine

Similar to what happened during the Euromaidan protests, citizen journalism and alternative media received a further boost from the conflict in Donbas. These new news outlets focus on providing the public with honest and unbiased information on what is happening between Russia-backed separatists and the Ukrainian national army. However, unlike during Euromaidan, the alternative media in this period is less likely to be connected to former mainstream professional Ukrainian journalists. For example, one of the most well-known alternative media sources to come from the conflict is LiveUAMap. This website live-maps events relevant to the war since 2014 and was created by a team of software engineers based in Dnipropetrovsk. It mainly uses Twitter to aggregate and chart the locations of deaths, bombings,

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105 Dovzhenko.
106 LiveUAMap.com.
fires, arrests, and even chilling photographs taken by civilians. Algorithms that populate the map use both Ukrainian and Russian sources and then translate them into English. Additionally, LiveUAMap also looks for at least two independent sources in order to verify that an event actually took place. Each event is categorized and assigned a color – red or blue – depending on which side of the conflict it pertains to most, with red for Russia and its supporters and blue for Ukraine and its supporters. The creators of LiveUAMap describe it as a “nonprofit, volunteer-run project of civic journalism.” Rodion Rozhovsky, one of the website’s creators, felt there was a dearth of information on the conflict being relayed by Russian outlets so a more balanced approach was needed, and that was what he sought out.

A second example of alternative media in post-Euromaidan conflict is StopFake. Whereas LiveUAMap focuses on conventional war, StopFake looks instead at the hybrid information war that is being waged simultaneously. StopFake is a website that checks and refutes information or propaganda that it finds in the Russian and Ukrainian press, including broadcast, print, and online. It has been described as “one of the consequential initiatives that now works outside the confines of the traditional press.” StopFake is a small, crowd-sourced project with a staff usually ranging from six to eight members, and it works in many languages. Additionally, it is very active on social media and has a large following. One of the site’s founders, Yevhen Fedchenko, said that he knows the Ukrainian foreign minister frequently uses StopFake’s material and sends it to embassies around the world. Fedchenko was also quoted as saying:

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108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 StopFake.com.
The proliferation of such journalistic products is crucial for tackling corruption. StopFake is not the only one in Ukraine; there are other websites that are doing investigative journalism and uncovering big stories. They’re an important element in keeping corruption and government … under surveillance and accountable. … The website-based projects are way more flexible in terms of what they can publish compared to the traditional media, which in Ukraine is mostly oligarch-owned and has its own political and economic agenda that is closely connected to, or originates in, corruption. The Internet provides lots of opportunities and social media really helps to spread the information and make it known to as many people as possible.112

All in all, StopFake has become one of the main outlets tackling Russian and Ukrainian propaganda, and it shows the importance of such independent and alternative media sources as well as the possibilities that go along with a pluralistic and more unbiased media landscape.

Fedchenko also referenced another important factor that is shaping the Ukrainian media landscape in the post-Euromaidan period, and that is alternative media that relies almost solely on the Internet to gather and disseminate its information.

**Outside influences and computer-assisted reporting**

In recent years, some of the most impressive and insightful investigations have been the result of global media and Internet-based collaboration. For example, both *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* got the Pulitzer Prize in 2013 for their joint coverage of the leaked National Security Agency documents. These types of developments in the field of journalism speak to the growing role of the computer-assisted reporter. “Computer-assisted reporting techniques … have been around for several years, but in recent years more tools and more material sources and data-driven journalism have appeared underpinned by a strong philosophy of openness and transparency.”113 There are a number of key computer-assisted reporting groups that have focused on the war in Donbas, but none more so than Bellingcat.114

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112 Bowler.
114 Bellingcat (Bellingcat.com).
An example of the growing concept of “global media,” Bellingcat is a website founded by Eliot Higgins that uses open-source intelligence to fill in holes about what happened on various battlefields across the world. Higgins is a citizen of the United Kingdom, and he started this project from his home there, which has grown into an operation involving eight volunteers. This is a team of self-taught, open-source intelligence analysts who can geolocate a Facebook video of a missile launch by matching the landscape to a different image on Google Earth or use Instagram posts to track armored vehicles as they trek across rugged terrain.115 These are exactly the techniques that Bellingcat used to authenticate videos shot in Syria during the height of the civil war there and document events in zones that were not even accessible to regular journalists.

In regards to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, Higgins and his team at Bellingcat followed the BUK missile convoy from Russia into Ukraine. It is widely understood that a BUK missile was the cause of the crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over Donetsk on July 17, 2014. Bellingcat reported that a BUK mobile launcher was spotted that day in an area controlled by pro-Russian rebels and that it came from a military convoy from Russia’s 53rd anti-aircraft brigade, a unit based in Kursk, Russia, but one that was sent on maneuvers near the Ukrainian border. Higgins said, “We can show it’s the same truck and show the route it took. We’ve got photographs, videos, people posting about seeing it on social media as it was travelling through their town. We know it went to the town of Snizhne, where it was unloaded, and it drove out of town heading south into an area of fields that was about two kilometers away.”116 Higgins also said that they found photographs taken in separatist-controlled Donetsk on the morning of July 17 that clearly show markings and damage on the missile launcher. So, with the help of satellite imagery and social media posts, their investigation proved that it was possible for the pro-Russian separatists

to secure such weapons specifically from this Russian brigade out of Kursk and use it to shoot down MH17. Higgins and his team at Bellingcat lay out all of this information in the Atlantic Council’s report “Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin’s War in Ukraine”\textsuperscript{117} as well as on their website.

Bellingcat is not the only open-source, computer-assisted reporting outlet that has gotten involved in the investigations. A number of unique forms of digital labor emerged in the wake of the downing of MH17. Matt Sienkiewicz, a scholar on the new form of digital reporting, says:

Whereas such investigations traditionally rely on expert analysis and strict information control, the Ukrainians took an unconventional, open-sourced approach to the case. By releasing key pieces of video evidence on social media, the Ukrainian government recruited a vast roster of skilled online analysts to work on its behalf without expending any financial resources. Placing this user activity in the context of scholarly studies of both fan labor and citizen surveillance, … the social and economic aspects of online culture enabled Ukraine to benefit significantly from this discourse produced by unpaid workers. Ultimately, the output of these laborers played a key role in counteracting Russia’s use of global broadcasting and expensive online propaganda to dominate international debate surrounding MH17\textsuperscript{118}.

Furthermore, Dutch prosecutors said they will “seriously study” claims by these citizen journalists and by Bellingcat. Thus, overall, despite the difficulties inherent in international online collaborations, when done well the results can create a larger impact than the work of any one organization and contributes to the public good. In that context, computer-assisted reporters are a great resource in investigations, particularly cross-border ones, and they are likely the precursors to the future of battlefield reporting without loss of life.

Overall, the Ukrainian media landscape continued to change in the period after Euromaidan and during the war in the Donbas region. At the same time, the trends of a weakening mainstream media and a strengthening alternative media continued as well. This is due to such developments as the mainstream journalists choosing patriotism over professionalism and thereby abandoning their journalistic standards, political infighting amongst the oligarchs who

\textsuperscript{118} Sienkiewicz, 208.
retained control over the mainstream, and the popularity of sites such as LiveUAMap and StopFake as well as the outside bolstering of Ukrainian alternative media by such forces as Bellingcat and other computer-assisted reporters who worked in the wake of the downing of MH17.

VI. The Ukrainian government and its information

Having outlined the development of the mainstream versus the alternative media in the period before, during, and after Euromaidan, we will now turn our attention to the second part of my thesis regarding the Ukrainian government and the third phase of mediatization. Beyond even the changes in leadership and politics, there have been major institutional changes to the Ukrainian government as well. One of those changes is the creation of the Ministry of Information Policy. The Ministry of Information Policy was created in December 2014\(^{119}\) and is headed by Yuriy Stets, a former producer at Kanal 5 and close personal friend of Poroshenko. Stets has stated that the purpose of the Ministry of Information Policy is to “destroy separatism” and “protect the country’s information and communications space from enemy attacks.”\(^{120}\) He has stated that it also aims to fix the poor coordination between often contradictory government agencies and to develop tools for resisting Russian information warfare. Moreover, Stets said the Ministry of Information Policy will “coordinate state aid for the media” and attract investment in order to create a “national information product.”\(^{121}\)

The Ministry of Information Policy created an army of online volunteer bloggers tasked with debunking misinformation in the Russian media and promoting pro-Ukrainian views on the

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\(^{119}\) Ministry of Information Policy (mip.gov.ua).


\(^{121}\) Ibid.
The so-called “information troops” have been dubbed the Ukraine Information Army. The website i-army.org went online on February 23, 2015, and 35,000 volunteers signed up to join on the first day. Stets is quoted as saying its purpose is to fight Russian robots and trolls, fake news reports, and “psychological pressure” from Moscow-based media. One of the information troops’ most well known recent missions was to post a propagandistic Ukrainian response to a Russian-made propaganda video called “The Truth about the Russian Occupant.” Bloggers in the Ukrainian information army are told to pose as residents of eastern Ukraine and to add from five to 10 friends per day on various social media platforms.

Furthermore, Stets has also promised to launch a new English-language news broadcast channel, Ukraine Tomorrow, which would broadcast alongside the privately owned station Ukraine Today from Studio 1+1, owned by Kolomoysky. Many observers believe this to be the Ukrainian response to the pro-Kremlin public diplomacy machine RT, formerly known as Russia Today. Overall, it appears that the Ukrainian government is stepping up its informational warfare tactics, and some Ukrainian officials have been especially criticized for downplaying casualties and losses in important battles, such as those at the Donetsk airport and the strategic rail hub of Debaltseve. Other examples of Ukraine beginning to create its own propaganda machine include an instance with popular show host Savik Shuster on his show “Savik Live.” In late 2013, Shuster invited an opposition leader onto his talk show, which was on a channel aligned with Yanukovych and so they promptly dropped the show. The show was then picked up by Kanal 5, founded during the Orange Revolution and owned by the liberal Poroshenko. On a show

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124 Yana Lyushnevskaya, “Ukraine’s new online army in media war with Russia,” BBC Monitoring (March 3, 2015).
125 “Правда про русского оккупанта,” YouTube (March 9, 2015).
following the initial fighting in eastern Ukraine, Shuster invited a Russian journalist who criticized the Ukrainian government for killing civilians in what he called a “fratricidal war.” The NTRBC issued a warning to Shuster’s show for violating a law against war propaganda and incitement of hatred. Shuster is quoted as saying, “My attempt at bringing balance to the discussion proved a step too far. There are now people who shouldn’t be on the air and things that shouldn’t be discussed.”126 While on the show a few months later, a deputy from Poroshenko’s party said, “Today, an information war is being waged against Ukraine… Our task is to be united, to comment as one.” More recently, in April 2016, Shuster was stripped of his work permit, due to Shuster’s alleged failure to notify authorities that he was under investigation by tax authorities.127

Additionally, Ukrainian authorities gloss over military losses to the point that observers now interpret the government’s daily situation briefings as euphemistic code with “14 [killed] means there was lots of fighting, and two means it was a relatively quiet day,” according to Vitaly Sych, editor of the weekly independent newspaper Novoe Vremya. While such obfuscation is not unheard of in other instances of conflict in the West, emerging trends such as this can be said to show that Ukraine is beginning to try to match or otherwise counter Russia’s finely tuned and well-funded propaganda machine.

This type of behavior is not limited to the newly created Ministry of Information Policy. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense has also been involved in propagating the information warfare by limiting journalists’ access to the ATO zone. In the last year, they have started the embedded journalism project. This project requires that all journalists (both foreign and domestic) are attached to Ukrainian national army military units in the ATO area and are put on a weekly

rotation.\textsuperscript{128} It involves a contract being signed between the journalist, the media outlet they work for, and the Ministry of Defense, which includes a non-disclosure clause for official secrets and any information that may threaten the information and national security of Ukraine. These contracts are known to be stricter and more controlling of the journalist’s work than other systems of journalists attaching to military units in other situations. Not only with the journalist be embedded with a military unit, but an official press officer will work with the journalist during the entire period as well. This officer is meant to ensure “compliance with the Ukrainian labor code and classifies the journalist’s stay in the ATO zone as an official mission.”\textsuperscript{129} Locations of embedded journalists include Shryokyne, Pisky, Avdiivka, and Schastya, all of which are in the Donetsk oblast except Schastya, which is in the Lugansk oblast.

In fact, the Ministry of Defense’s embedded journalism project is actually in conjunction with the new Ministry of Information Policy. This project has resulted in two films, 15 articles, and 18 video reportages.\textsuperscript{130} As expected, the sentiment of these products – particularly the films – is pro-Ukrainian and generally does not meet standards of unbiased reporting. While attaching journalists to military units it not necessarily unique to Ukraine, the strict control over the embedded journalism project and the fact that this is a joint project with the Ministry of Information Policy make this an exceptional case.

Therefore, based on such developments as the creation of the Ministry for Information Policy, the information warfare campaign that the Ukrainian government appears to be beginning to undertake, and the embedded journalism project at the Ministry of Defense, it appears that the Ukrainian government has appropriated information and media for its own purposes in many cases. However, it is important to note that the Ukrainian government’s capability to control the

\textsuperscript{128} “Embedded journalism project,” Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} “’Embedded journalism’ program in Ukraine released 2 films,” 112 UA (August 2015).
narrative is still in its initial stages, and that these efforts by the government have not resulted in complete domination over Ukraine’s information space.

VII. Analysis and discussion

Having now gone over the changing forces in Ukraine’s media landscape and the tension between Ukraine’s mainstream and alternative medias as well as presenting the new developments to do with the Ukrainian government and its information policies, we will look at these ideas in the context of Hoskins’ and O’Loughlin’s theories. The conceptual framework that Hoskins and O’Loughlin set out provides us with a means of understanding the changing dynamics in Ukraine’s media landscape, and the three phases of mediatization explain what is happening within Ukraine on a macro level.

There is a weak mainstream media in Ukraine today. The beginning of Ukraine’s mainstream media development was marked by an identity crisis in the newly independent country as it was thrust into a rapidly globalizing world. No one vision of what Ukraine’s new media should look like emerged, and thus it was pulled in many different directions at an early stage, preventing it from taking a strong first step in creating a pluralistic and democratic media sector. Additionally, residual Soviet influence and a dominant Russian media presence both in broadcast and print persisted throughout the 1990s and well into the present day. While working to counteract the pressure from Russian media, the Kuchma administration also seriously hurt the development of Ukrainian national media by expediting privatization of the media in a very opaque and nontransparent manner, which helped a small group of close friends and political allies. While the Orange Revolution saw an increase of alternative media activity and power was temporarily taken from the mainstream media, oligarchs continued to rule the mainstream and use the outlets
for their own purposes. Corruption was rampant, and media freedoms were continually impinged upon. Then, during Euromaidan, mainstream media was not consistent in its coverage of events and many journalists defected to activities outside their outlets’ purview. Trust in Ukrainian mainstream media was drastically reduced during this time. Furthermore, after Euromaidan, fighting in eastern Ukraine prevented journalists from doing their work there, and most journalists chose patriotism over professionalism, which further undermined the public’s trust in the mainstream media and debilitated it as a whole. Overall, Ukraine has not managed to build a large and developed media market since Ukraine gained independence in 1991.

On the other hand, whereas mainstream media has suffered, alternative media in Ukraine has grown to become particularly robust. With the seed having been planted during the Orange Revolution, the number of alternative media sources and their respective audience share flourished during the Euromaidan protests and continued their steady rise even in the period after Euromaidan and during the conflict in the east. Social media and increased access to the Internet have also aided in this growth, but more importantly the number of Ukrainian citizens who have turned to alternative news sources and the respect they place on independent news media is key.

Ukraine is caught in the second phase of mediatization. The media landscape is highly fragmented and disjointed. There are too many players in a relatively limited field, and the entire market is over-saturated. There is no single main flow of news in the country. Because the mainstream media has weakened and alternative media has proliferated in Ukraine since Euromaidan, there is relatively little chance that the Ukrainian media will enter into the third phase of mediatization where the weak, untrusted, and disparaged oligarch-owned private or government-owned outlets will appropriate alternative media content and use it for their own
purposes. This is due to all the reasons outlined above, and the fact that there is no discernible trend that would lead to such a conclusion.

However, the same cannot be said for the Ukrainian government. Based on the recent developments such as the creation of the Ministry of Information Policy and the embedded journalism project, it can be argued that the Ukrainian government itself has shown signs of entering into the third phase of mediatization. This takes the form of increased appropriation – and even weaponization – of information for political or geostrategic reasons. The desire to control the information and media space and to coordinate a “unified response” and one voice across all of Ukraine to the threats it faces is clearly in line with what Hoskins and O’Loughlin identify as the third phase in that the government is appropriating media for itself. However, it is important to note that these are first steps by the Ukrainian government to shape the information space, and the government as of yet does not have the capability to control the narrative in the same dominating fashion as the Russian government, for example.131

The Ukrainian government’s entrance into the third phase of mediatization is in part due to the overly fragmented and disordered media landscape. The weak mainstream and prolific alternative media have left Ukrainians without a single, mostly trusted flow of news and information in the country. And as Hoskins and O’Loughlin describe, this type of unruly media landscape can affect decision-making on the part of the government and businesses. Consequently, because there is no concentrated or singular unified voice in the media, the Ukrainian government has chosen to essentially try to create its own media flow that will help serve its own ends.

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131 On the note of Russia, it is important to recognize that Russia’s own information warfare and “disinformation campaigns” against Ukraine could also be considered a major impetus for Ukraine’s recent weaponization of information and attempts to take control over the information space.
These conclusions have many far-reaching ramifications, and I argue that this discovery helps to explain a lot of what is happening in Ukraine today as it struggles with the fight in Donbas and with comprehensive domestic reforms. First of all, Ukraine is a unique case because the mainstream media is so underdeveloped compared to other Eastern European and former Soviet bloc countries, and it is in such a distinctive position vis-à-vis Russia. Yet Euromaidan and the war in eastern Ukraine have created a strong current of alternative media unseen in other otherwise comparative countries with similar situations in recent years. If the alternative media is not appropriated by the mainstream, then it will likely continue to grow. As a result, the media landscape in Ukraine will continue to be overly diverse and fragmented. Tangentially, increased levels of citizen journalism are usually indicative of increased respect for freedom of information, but it does not always signal increased trust in the press. This is the central issue in Ukraine now and has been proven to be detrimental to countries in the past. If the Ukrainian government does not have one solid flow of news within the country then it is hard to make good and well thought-out decisions, as Hoskins and O’Loughlin argue. Finally, continued fractionalization of Ukraine’s media landscape can lead to more institutionalized information warfare and increased creation of pro-Ukrainian propaganda, similar to what we are beginning to see in the government today.

VIII. For further research

There are many potential avenues for future research on this topic. One that I think would be particularly illustrative is a comparative study of Ukraine and Georgia. Having both been part of the Soviet Union and subject to strong Russian influence, the two countries had comparable early stages of forming an independent media in the 1990s and both experienced Color Revolutions.
Ukraine and Georgia share many similarities such as diminishing trust in the mainstream media, opaque television media ownership, and limited Internet use throughout the country. However, there are substantive differences between them. For instance, the level of alternative media in Georgia is less than in Ukraine. It would be very interesting to see where and when these two countries trajectories diverged as they formed their pluralistic and democratic media environments and to dissect the driving forces and attitudes behind each of the two landscapes. Additionally, there is no government body in Georgia similar to Ukraine’s Ministry of Information Policy, which is interesting considering Georgia is also subject to Russia’s information warfare and Russian media has gained in popularity there in recent years. To chronicle the different developments in the two countries and compare them would help shed light on the changing dynamics in post-Soviet media landscape and would likely help explain political and societal developments as well.

A second topic for further research is the increasingly important role of the computer-assisted reporter and the influence that outside reporters or citizen journalism has on an event or issue anywhere in the world. The case of Eliot Higgins and Bellingcat is extremely interesting given that he never set foot in Syria and only recently travelled to Ukraine, and yet his work has been widely read and cited in Ukraine and beyond. The Pulitzer Prize being awarded to two newspapers for the entirely computer-based research on the NSA documents goes to further show that the computer-assisted reporter is changing the face of journalism today. What is most critical to this change is that computer-assisted reporters need not be professional journalists, as is seen in the case of Higgins, and that can have a large impact on the way information is gathered and spread during times of crisis by further reducing the power of the mainstream. As has been discussed, the veracity and trust that audiences put in the media are key to a healthy
media ecology. A common saying among journalists and editors is that the only real product a news outlet has is its reputation, thus the influence of well-trusted and innovative outside forces and computer-assisted reporters serves to further undermine the strength of mainstream media in countries around the world, especially in the post-Soviet space because of the unique and relatively recent growth of independent and privately owned media in those countries. Looking into the future effects of this development could prove fruitful.

Finally, a third potential avenue of research – and recommendation – is to look into ways that the Ukrainian mainstream media can be strengthened. As has been said, a well-trusted and strong mainstream media is integral to a healthy government-media and government-public relationship. Thus, helping Ukraine to form a stronger and more well-rounded media market could help solve some of the systemic problems we see in the government today, including corruption and political in-fighting.

IX. Conclusion

Ukraine faces a steep challenge as it works to reform itself. Due to its historical closeness with Russia and the timid first steps of its independent market, mainstream media in Ukraine has been consistently weakened over the course of decades. However, while mainstream media has declined, alternative media has risen in Ukraine. The Ukrainian public appears to be more receptive and trusting of the novel and innovative alternative media sources in Ukraine that have worked to shape the public information space especially during periods of conflict such as Euromaidan and the war in the east. Because of the clash of these two strong forces, what we see is a collision and the effects that that collision has on the Ukrainian government. As Hoskins and O’Loughlin posit, a strong mainstream media system can overtake and appropriate the
alternative media. But based on the behavior of the Ukrainian media landscape, this is unlikely to happen there. However, the same cannot be said for the Ukrainian government, which appears to have embarked on a path of information creation and weaponization, and which can be in part due to the overly fragmented and weak media environment within Ukraine. The catalyst for all these changes has been the slow burn of Ukraine’s recent crises of Euromaidan and the war in eastern Ukraine, which, as the quote at the opening of this paper says, has brought the media onto the frontline of change along with the protestors and the soldiers.
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