Focus group survey
Case of Latvia 2023

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Objective of the study

- to study how Latvian media audiences perceive, interpret and making sense of media by evaluating the quality of media and journalism

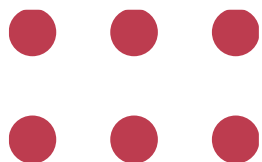**Data collection:** Latvian Facts
Time: August - September, 2022
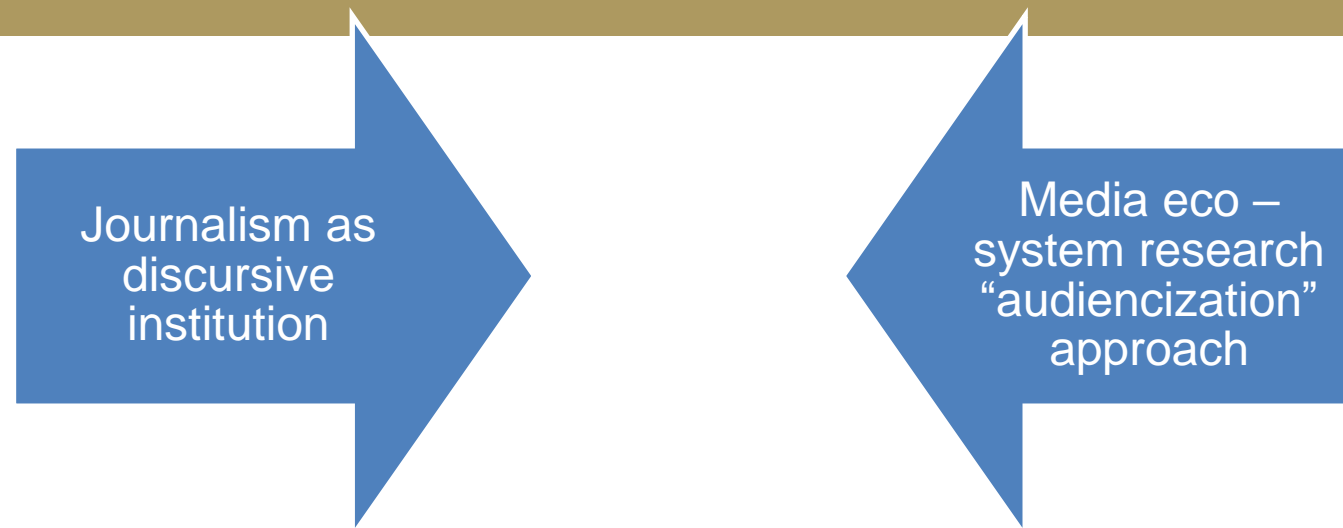Funded by Public Service Media Council
Research method: online focus group discussion (FGD), thematic analysis
Volume: 7 discussions, 42 participants in total (6 respondents in each FGD).
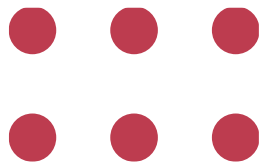FGD language: 4 FGDs in Latvian and 3 FGDs in Russian.
This presentation summarizes the results relevant to the Russian-speaking audience

Two theoretical approaches

Journalism as discursive institution

Media eco – system research "audiencization" approach

Topics of focus group discussion questions
- Me and the various flow of information around me
- Functions and roles of journalism / media, including public media
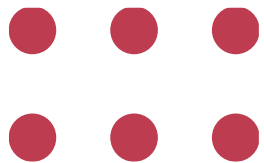- Interpretation of the quality of journalism
- Audience and elections

With the help of social media, news is obtained from the professional media, often without identifying the original source of the news.
Research participants generally consider themselves informed. However, this is only headline-level awareness.
If the news seems important, then it is very likely that it will be checked by several sources.
In connection with the closed Russia's media, there is no shortage of them, however, the participants of the study still value the quality of the entertainment content of these media.
Discussants use the media in Latvian and Russian, however, they regret that there is too little content in Russian about Latvian events.

There is a decreasing distinction between the information offered by professional media and social media.

Participants highly values the diversity of opinions, wants to say that various views and their views are lacking in content of professional media.

The classical professional standards of journalism are very important.
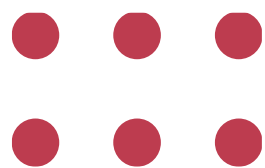Support the role of public media, but consider them less interesting and necessary.
In participants' understanding of the role of the media, the informants combine clear normative ideas with distrust of the media.
Not interested in election-related content, feel poorly informed about elections.
Demonstrates a high degree of fatigue regarding war in Ukraine news.

"I get information mostly from the internet. I have subscribed to various news channels on the Facebook platform, such as Delfi, Chaika, Gorod. I also like to watch Euronews. For my husband, every day starts and ends with it. Among the blocked Russian media, the shows "Davaj poženimsa" and "Modnij prigovor" I miss the most. But I don't feel the need for closed channels at all." (Female, 32, Latgale, HE, Russian)

"I use Facebook the most. There you can immediately learn about various topics and there is a lot of information. Usually they are Delfi, also Gorod.lv or some others. I don't go to the homepages of these portals, but I look through Facebook. /../When it comes to what's going on in the world, I don't touch political topics. I read the good news, and try to bypass and ignore the bad news." (Female, 27, Latgale, professional education, Polish)

"On weekdays, I listen to LR4 Doma Square from seven to nine in the morning, where you can find out what is happening in Latvia. I mostly go to Facebook, look at the headlines. My Facebook is set to Russian, it usually offers information in Russian, but I don't care which language to read. I also look at Latvian news on Tiktok, watch Youtube, Euronews. (Male, 29, Liepāja, prof. education, Russian)

I mostly get information from YouTube. Local news from liepajniekiem.lv. If the topic becomes interesting, I will Google it, open five or six pages, read if there is a difference. I have not noticed any differences between information in Latvian and Russian, only information in Russian comes with a delay. (Male, 26, Liepāja, prof. education, Ukrainian)
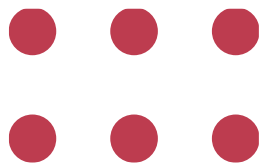
"I get news on Facebook, Instagram. I trust Čaika.lv and Gorod.lv because there are people working there who provide verified information." (Female, 18, Latgale, basic education, Russian)

Examples. Perception of media content

"My husband and I used to subscribe many newspapers and magazines. Recently, we sometimes buy "MK Latvija", but it's rare, because I don't find positivity there. I used to get up in the mornings and listen to LR4, but then I decided there was too much negativity. I came to work stressed. Thus, I don't do it anymore. The husband continued to listen for a long time. Men, as you know, have more time." (Female, 62, Latgale, HE, Russian)

"The news is mostly negative. One should not be ignorant of what is going on in the world, but there should be some balance. If any negative news is published, it should be followed by something positive .There should be a choice of what to read, but often there isn't." (Female, 27, Latgale, professional education, Polish)
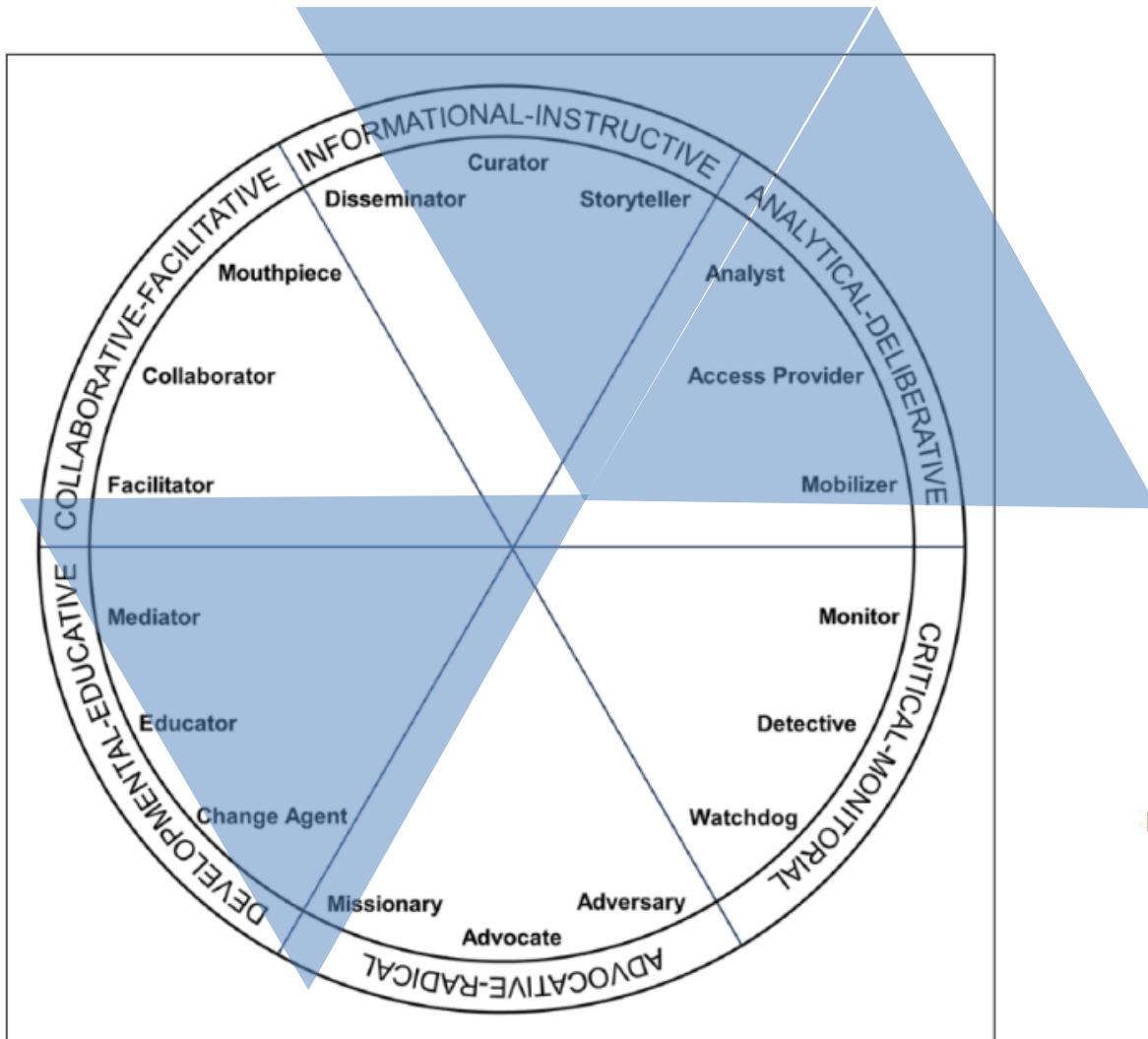
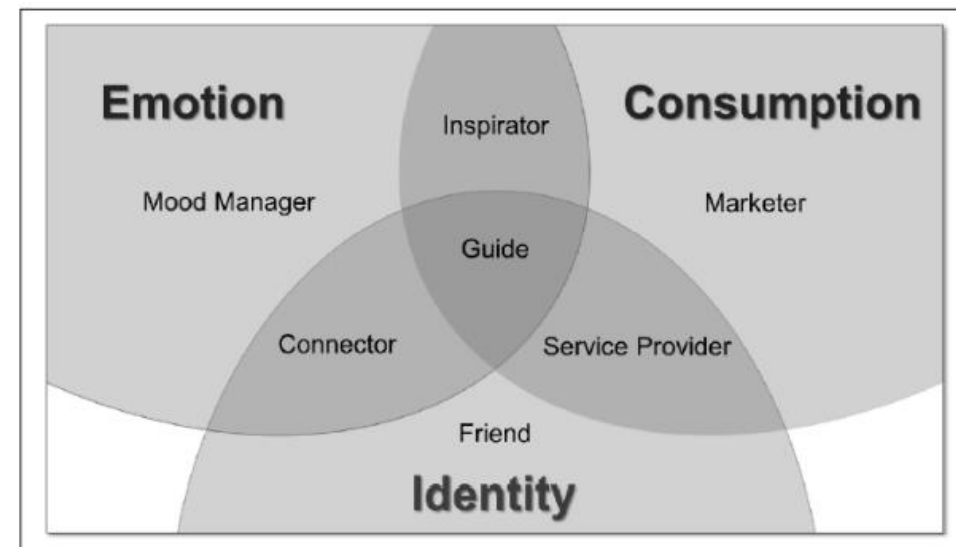Figure 1. Journalistic roles in the domain of political life.

Figure 2. Journalistic roles in the domain of everyday life.

Journalistic roles in the domain of p

- Convey a positive image of political leaders
- Suppport government (state) politics
- Support national development
- Speak on behalf of the marginalized
- Point toward possible solutions to society's problems
- Educate the audience
- Promote peace and tolerance
- Set the political agenda
- Influence public opinion
- Advocate for social change
- Provide information people need to form political opinion
- Let people express their views
- Provide analysis of current affairs
- Motivate people to participate in politics   64

0   20   40   60   80   100   120

Important (%)   Unimportant (%)   N/A(%)

Functions with the greatest differences in opinion between Russian speaking respondents:
- **Tell stories that emotionally move the audience**
- **Influences public opinion**

Latvian speaking respondents:
- Support national development
- Advocate for social change
- Speaks on behalf of marginalized groups
- Promote peace and tolerance

Journalistic roles in the domain of everyday life

Journalistic roles in a domain of

Tell stories that emotionally move the audience

Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life

Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience

Provide entertainment and relaxation

0   20   40   60   80   100   120

■ Important (%)   ■ Unimportant (%)   ■ N/A(%)

Functions with the greatest differences in opinion between audience and journalists:
- Supports government (state) policy
- Sets the political agenda
- Communicates a positive image of political leaders
- Influences public opinion
- Speaks on behalf of marginalized groups
- Provides advice and guidance for everyday life

Journalistic roles

"It is interesting to watch when at least someone goes against the wave. It's good when journalists expose people behind our problems. Someone gets what they deserve and it's not like everyone is silent." (Male, 29, Liepāja, prof. education, Russian)

"Now the line [between professional and non- professional media] is almost invisible. The news that professional journalists give us is nothing but dry information. When you go to some bloggers on Youtube, you can see that they are trying to look deeper into it. It seems that sometimes that an amateur has researched the topic more and better than a journalist." (Male, 26, Liepāja, prof. education, Ukrainian)
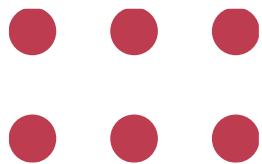
"Education is an important function. There should be a neutral point of view, everything shall be presented as it is. I don't know to what extent journalists are honest, it may be that even a journalist cannot express his opinion because he is being watched, controlled." (Female, 27, Latgale, professional education, Polish)

"It is good if a person is able to be objective. If he presents any information, he does not try to agree with anyone's position, but conveys the information as it is, avoiding expressing his personal opinion and not showing his feelings." (Female, 27, Latgale, designer, professional education, Polish)

"It's a sad portal, rus.lsm. It is not about Latvia, about Ukraine, Covid. It's sad that they think that the Russian-speaking audience is only interested in Ukraine and Covid. I entered in LSM from the phone. The top three topics were Ukraine, Covid19 and "TČK". Next is the content, where something exploded, the teachers' strike in Latvia, etc. All this is not interesting to me at all. I would like to read about people. How I survived, how I coped with it. (Female, 34, Riga, HE, Jewish)

"LSM is more for a non-young audience. It is more for mature people. Tiktok, bloggers, something like that are more suitable for young people." (Female, 36, Riga, higher education, Russian)
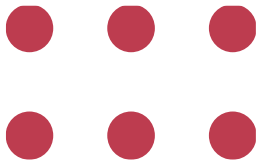
PSMs and commercial media

PSMs

- More reliable, trustable

- One sided

- Boring, serious

- State/government interests related

- For mature/older audience

Commercial

- Focused on profit, entertaining

- Diversity of views

- For all audience groups

Media and war in Ukraine

"Latvian mass media are subjective on the issue of the war in Ukraine. They have set themselves one point of view, one bad side, and all the news is spreading it. The other side cannot be seen. For example, if I want to insult a nation, I find a quote. The other opinion is not difficult to find. There are news portals, for example Facebook, which are not yet blocked yet. The time is interesting though. It is not always the case that only one view is correct. There is also another side." (Male, 24, Latgale, HE, Russian)

"For example, somewhere in the Russian news I saw that Ukrainians complain that Russians shoot at their houses, but Russians complain that they defend themselves. It seems to be both. Truth is somewhere in the middle." (Male, 37, Riga, HE, Russian)

"Everyone is tired of the war. On the one hand, it's a pity, but we can't really help. We fear how far it will all go and we have to think about it." (Male, 31, Liepāja, basic education, Russian)

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There is a suspicious attitude towards media independence in Latvia, because they are perceived as biased, not objective enough.

A new "people's theory" is emerging that the media cannot be independent at all. This mirrors what was found in other studies, that there is an instrumentalized view on media operations.

The second "people's theory" is related to the diversity of opinions and tolerance about different opinions - in the media environment of Latvia, diverse opinions are not sufficient in relation to the Russian-speaking population, and local information available in Russian.
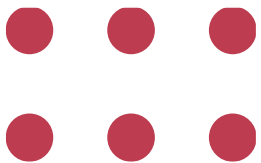
Contradictory attitude towards PSM - they are highly praised, but at the same time PSMs are seen as more representing the state's opinion, politically biased.

Conclusions & discussion

Contradictory attitude towards the role of journalists.

The duties of the media and journalists are perceived normatively, informants have high requirements for the media to be neutral, professional, responsible, reflect all groups of society, analyse, explain, verify facts, fight against misinformation, expose those in power.

However, for some informants, this is not important in the context of individual media use, as other types of information in other sources seems more important.