

READING PREFERENCES AND HABITS OF
ARMENIAN ONLINE NEWS READERS

by

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Introduction

Online media is a relatively new source of information in Armenia. It has entered into the Armenian reality and established itself as a competitive news source among other leading outlets in the last decade. Despite their prosperity and recent popularity in Armenia, online news outlets still face several problems and are still not available to all the layers of the Armenian population. But it is undeniable that during this short period of being in the field of news media, online news websites have become a big part of people's lives, as they are considered to be the most liberal, objective, and diverse news sources. As a non-governmental organization called Freedom House states, online media in Armenia is free, unlike print media. However, this freedom of online media also has its opposite side as it can also have negative influence, such as too many online news outlets with unprofessional attitudes and distortion of news for the sake of having a big reading audience. But aside from those online news outlets there are many trustworthy ones which have already gained a huge number of readers and are considered to be the leading online news outlets.

Unlike sufficient information about the Armenian online news websites and their activity, not enough statistics are available about the Armenian online news readers and their reading preferences and habits. Thus, in order to have a clear picture of the Armenian online media field it is necessary to examine both sides – readers and online journalists. Especially finding the preferences of the Armenian online news readers can help to create more effective communication between the readers and the online journalists and, eventually, can develop the Armenian online media field.

As an important platform for reaching the online news readers, social media is a significant target of this research. Today almost all the Armenian online news outlets have their Facebook pages with a large number of subscribers who usually come across with the articles of those news outlets in their news feeds. What needs to be clarified from this fact is how often Armenian online news readers share news on social media and write comments, which topics interest them the most or which headlines they are more prone to click and, generally, which social network they use as a platform for news sharing or gathering socially active people.

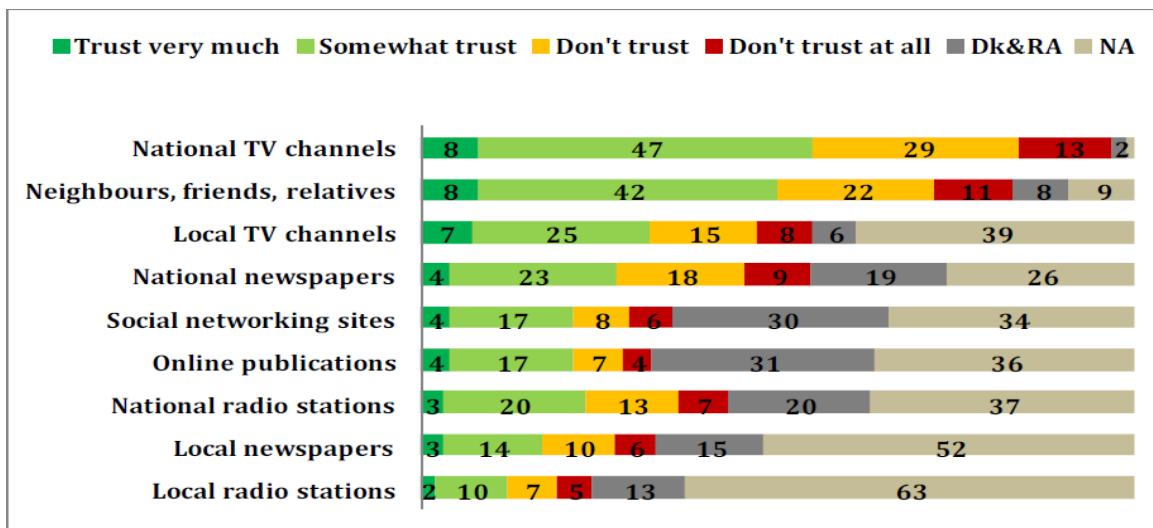
The above-mentioned facts provide sufficient background information about the online media in Armenia and give a platform for examining the preferences and habits of the Armenian online news readers.

Literature Review

Through the recent years online news outlets have developed so much that now they face the difficulty of tough competition for readers. Even though online media is still a newcomer among other news outlets, it is already the leading news provider all over the world. And because of numerous online newspapers and their competition today the online news outlets have developed special techniques to catch readers' attention and gain their commitment.

The online media is an especially new phenomenon in the Armenian reality but despite the fact of being new in the Armenian media field, its popularity is growing year by year. One of the reasons is that online media in Armenia is free and journalists feel more or less comfortable in sharing political and economic news. Another advantage of the Armenian online news is that it provides diversity – online news outlets that also have print versions (Haykakan Zhamanak, Aravot and Hraparak), multilingual online news outlets (News.am, Lurer.am), based on non-profit organizations (Civilnet.am), online newspapers with investigative content (Azatutyun.am. hetq.am) etc. These factors provide freedom to the readers and they gain an opportunity to express their opinions and have a two-way communication with the journalists (Sargsyan).

According to a USAID report in 2011 67% of Armenians do not use online newspapers or don't know whether they are trustworthy or not. However, 83% of the Armenian online news readers trust the credibility of the online news outlets and are satisfied with the content. The statistics by the USAID “Armenian Media Landscape” report is distributed in the following chart: **(Figure 1)**



On the other hand, 47% of Armenians somewhat trust TV media. What is more interesting is that neighbors, relatives and friends are the second most trusted information sources (Pearce). The importance of an outside group as a reliable source of information is examined by Eun Go who divides three kinds of sources: bandwagon, identity and expertise. Bandwagon sources are the ones that are suggested collectively. Identity sources are the ones suggested by in-group members or, in other words, from people who are from the same social group, while high-expertise sources are the widely known news outlets that are accepted as credible sources. It turns out that all types of these sources influence the readers' preferences when they are in interaction. Thus, the results of the research show that the group can have an important role on an individual in building trust about certain news sources and the ideal and most trustworthy source of information for readers is the one that is suggested at the same time by a high-expertise source and a large group of users (Go).

In addition to the outside influence on the online readers, another factor that plays an important role for the readers is the social network, which provides the readers with a platform to express their own opinion about certain news and also creates a bridge between the readers and journalists and, as a result, helps to meet the needs of readers more effectively. In other words, the readers directly participate in the production of the news and share with their personalised feedbacks. This is a big step from traditional journalism into collaborative and converging journalism. However, the social networks, like Twitter and Facebook are better spheres for expressing opinions rather than having debates (Gualler). According to Laura Baghdasaryan, head of the Region Research Center, Facebook is the main platform that gathers socially

active Armenians who express their opinions on various issues and even make their voices heard by the government (Melikyan).

Also social networks have contributed to the development of competition among different news outlets which helps to provide the readers with news as fast as possible. But according to Cheney Thomas's interviews conducted with journalists, the speed of news provided by social media decreases the depth of the news (Thomas). The same conclusion is drawn also by The Open Society Foundation in Armenia, which claims that even though online media has developed rapidly since 2009 and news has started to appeal its readers with a high speed, the quality of the news has decreased and even lacks accuracy (Melikyan).

The impact of the tough competition among online news outlets is mainly reflected in the headlines of the news as the news outlets try to create the most appealing headline regardless the depth so that the readers would prefer to click their headline over another. Even though the habits of the readers have changed through the time and almost 80% of online readers don't make it past the headline, some techniques of writing a headline help to appeal the reader and make them click to read what is behind the headline. A blogger Nathan Safran claims that the most effective techniques that appeal the reader are the following: normal ("Ways To Make Hair Shiny"), question ("What Are Ways To Make Hair Shiny?"), how to ("How To Make Hair Shiny"), number ("15 Ways To Make Hair Shiny") and reader-addressing ("Ways you need to make your hair shiny"). These results in some extent coincide with the results of the survey of this paper. According to Safran's survey, online news readers' most preferred headlines had numbers (36%), then reader addressing (21%), "how to" (17%), then normal format (15%) and the headline preferred the least contained a question (11%). The preferences among male and female readers were almost the same, except that women were more predisposed to headlines with numbers than males. Another important factor that affect the readers' preferences is the presence of superlatives in the headlines (ex. "The 27 **Best** Ways To Design A Room", "The 27 **Best** Ways **Ever** To Design A Room" etc.). Safran's findings show that more than half of the readers prefer headlines that have one or no superlatives (Safran). What makes headlines more attractive is also the use of sentimental and subjective language, that is, headlines that contain many adjectives. According to Elena Hensinger's research the more sentimental is the language of the news outlet the more global appeal that outlet gets. However, besides the sentimental language the topic of the news also

plays an important role in setting certain appeal among the readers. In general, topics of the news are divided into two groups: “Public Affairs” (Elections, Inflation and Prices, Markets, Business, Politics and Petroleum) and “Non-Public Affairs” (Religion, Science, Sports, Travel and Weather). As the results show the higher the scores of the “Non-Public Affairs” the more appealing it is perceived by the general audience (Hensing). Another research done a little bit earlier than Hensing’s, analyzes an American azcentral.com news website. It provides the list of the most viewed topics, which are crime/safety (31.7%), business (18.4%), entertainment (11.0%). Politics is on the fourth place. On the other hand, the main news values preferred by the readers are proximity (79%), conflict (31.0%), human interest (18.5%), tragedy/disaster (16.4%), magnitude (13.9%), timeliness (7.7%), and prominence (6.7%). Thus, it turns out that the readers are more prone to click on crime, business and soft news stories (Schmidt).

The above-mentioned researches conducted in different countries more or less create an overview on the factors that affect the online news media and its readers. What is interesting is that all of those factors are interconnected and one causes the emergence of the other. Moreover, almost all those results are applicable in the global scale, including Armenia. As it was mentioned above the groups play a very important part in shaping the habits and preferences of the Armenian online news readers. This may have different reasons, but as the report by USAID doesn’t provide the main reason why the outside groups are so important for the Armenians, therefore, this research tries to check whether this phenomenon is still present in 2017 and what news sources are appealing and most trusted today and why.

In case of social networks, unlike other countries the main platform for news sharing and public debate is Facebook, rather than Twitter, as the latter is not popular in Armenia. Even though Odnoklassniki.ru social network has the most users in Armenia, it is only used for personal contacts and interpersonal communications. The paper also discusses the reasons why Twitter has not developed in Armenia through the recent years and why it is not preferred by Armenian online news readers and online newspapers as a platform for news sharing.

As social networks provide speed of news supply and readers’ and journalists’ two-way communication, on the other hand, they decrease the value of the news. In addition to this, in Armenia the

quality of online news is decreased not only because of the speed and competition, but also because of the lack of experience and media literacy of the journalists. As the President of Yerevan Press Club Boris Navasardian says, “We do not see an increase in professional level, i.e. in this case development does not imply professionalization, and unfortunately the prevalence of dilettantism is being increasingly seen in the field of news.” (Melikyan) The lack of professionalism is also noticed in the headlines of the Armenian online news articles. Even though the journalists try to adopt the foreign forms and techniques of making appealing headlines for the readers, instead of focusing on the overall appeal of the headline they focus on making it as sensational as possible even if they exaggerate or do not provide accurate information. This argument is still debatable in Armenia and this paper shows thorough examination of this matter through researches, surveys and interviews as previously no researches have been conducted about the quality and the influence of the headlines of Armenian news outlets, even though they are believed to be the most influential part of the news articles.

As the Armenian reports about the field of the online news have not gone deeper into more specific preferences of Armenian online news readers, Schaudt’s research done on an American news website, azcentral.com, gave useful ideas for conducting a similar research on an Armenian news website to find how are the news preferences of Armenian readers different from that of American readers.

Overall, the above-mentioned sources became a very important platform for starting a survey in Armenia, as the literature about the online media in Armenia does not provide enough information about the preferences and habits of the Armenian online news readers.

Research question

The research answers several questions. The main question is the following:

What reading habits and preferences do the Armenian online news readers have?

This question is broad and can be divided into several questions. As according to many researches, conducted in other countries, headlines have very serious impact on news readers’ preferences, the research

aims to find the answer to the question of *what type of headlines appeal to the Armenian online news readers the most*.

Besides headline preferences the research also aims to find out *what topics and news values appeal to the Armenian online news readers most*. Aside from preferences and appealing headlines and articles, the research focuses on the activity of the Armenian online news readers in social media. As most of the online news readers find and share the news through social media, this research also tries to find out *how active are the Armenian news readers on sharing news on social media, as well as which social networks they mostly prefer as a platform for discussions and expressing opinions about certain news*.

In order to have a clear picture and some background information for answering the previous questions, the research also focuses on the overall situation of the Armenian online media, its problems and specificities compared to foreign online newspapers.

Methodology

The research questions of this project emphasize the need of surveys among Armenians as the main objective of the research is to find out the readers' preferences and habits. In order to have a holistic view, the research consists of online and face-to-face surveys and interviews with journalists and professionals in the field of media.

As the survey targeted the Armenians aged 18 and older, the face-to-face surveys were implemented in the Armenian State University of Economics, Vanadzor Technology Center, NIKA Club of Intellectual Education in Noyemberyan. A survey was also conducted with the method of random selection by approaching middle-aged people in the streets. The reason for that was that in most cases middle-aged people, especially men, are not active in social media, and there is a low probability that they may fill in the online survey. The face-to-face survey included 75 participants. The project also suggested the online version of this survey so as to reach a wider audience and include people living outside Yerevan. Overall, the two surveys included 311 participants from ages 18 to 77.

The survey consisted of questions designed in various forms – Likert scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions. The first part of the survey asked for some demographic information, such as age, gender, residence and field of occupation in order to have general information about the participants and later be able to create certain correlations. On the second part the participants answered how often they read online news, which social media they use for sharing the news and how often they write comments and have online news discussions with other users on social media. The options for the participants about the frequency of news sharing on social media range from “several times a day” to “once in 6 months” or “never”. In addition to that, the participants were asked to indicate which social media site they use as a platform for news sharing: Facebook, Twitter, Odnoklassniki, Vkontakte or any other social network. This information helped to understand which social media the Armenians find more appropriate for sharing news and how active they are as news readers.

“Armenian Media Landscape” research by USAID was conducted in 2011 about Armenians’ preferences of news sources, where it turned out that online newspapers were not popular in the Armenian society and, thus, they were not one of the most preferred and trusted news sources. However, since 2011 the online newspapers have very intensively integrated into Armenian reality and the results that USAID had, may have changed drastically. For that reason, firstly the survey indicated several news sources and the participants ranked them from the most trusted to the least. Their main options were national TV channel, neighbors, national newspapers, social networking sites, online newspapers, and national radio stations.

After evaluating the trustfulness of different news sources the participants were asked to choose their most preferred news topics (they could choose up to three topics). Here the methodology of Elena Hensinger was used as she found out the most appealing topics for the readers from 14 news outlets. Arising from that method, the survey participants were asked to choose the most appealing topics among the following: politics, economics, international, science, culture, sport, weather, show business, and fashion. This question helped to answer one of the main research questions about the online readers’ preferences.

On the other hand, the headlines as well play a very important role in appealing to the readers, because even though online news readers may have some primary news topic preferences, headlines of even

not very appealing topics can influence the readers and make them click and read the actual article. For that reason, the survey provided headlines constructed with different tools of headline writing (headlines with numbers, reader-addressing, question, normal method, and with a “how to” expression) and the participants had to choose one of the headlines that appeal them the most.

The second part of the research included semi-structured interviews with journalists, editors and professionals in the field of media. The interviewees were representatives from different online news outlets, such as Civilnet.am, Past.am, and Media.am. In the first part of the interview the results of the survey about the online readers’ preferences were presented to the journalists and specialists and they gave their opinion about the results. In the second part of the interview the interviewees were asked to speak about their findings about their readers or, in other words, they presented the situation from their perspective, which included their findings about the readers’ preferences of topics and also their activity in online discussions. As Sky Schaudt in his research work tried to find the most viewed topics and news values of the readers by analyzing azcentral.com news website, this research as well cooperated with the editor of past.am online news outlet who shared with her findings about the most viewed news and the most preferred topics by the Armenian audience.

On the other hand, the media experts also spoke about the obstacles that online journalists face today, including the violence of their freedom to touch certain topics. The specialists were also asked to evaluate the role of gradually developing social media and its advantages and disadvantages in the field of news producing, sharing and discussions. The interview was also aimed to examine the reason why Twitter is not a popular field of news sharing in Armenia unlike many other countries in the world.

These questions are all designed to take from the participants the necessary information to find out the main preferences of the Armenian online news readers. First of all, they aim to build a background, such as how much people trust online newspaper, or how free the online journalists and their readers feel in sharing and having debates about different news. Also, it is important to have the big picture of the Armenian online media, such as its main problems and challenges. After having the overall picture the research goes deeper into the preferences and habits of the readers. The research overall is based on the

combination of the results from the surveys with online news readers and the interviews with the journalists. These results not only help to understand the preferences of the Armenian online news readers, but it also helps to find some correlations between the preferences of the readers and their age, gender, residence and field of occupation.

Research Findings and Analysis

Online and face-to-face surveys provided important information about the reading habits and preferences of the Armenian online news readers. The research also included interviews with media experts and an online news website editor and journalists who shared their experience in the field of media including their experience with their readers. The combination of those two elements (surveys and interviews) led to very interesting and at times contradicting findings.

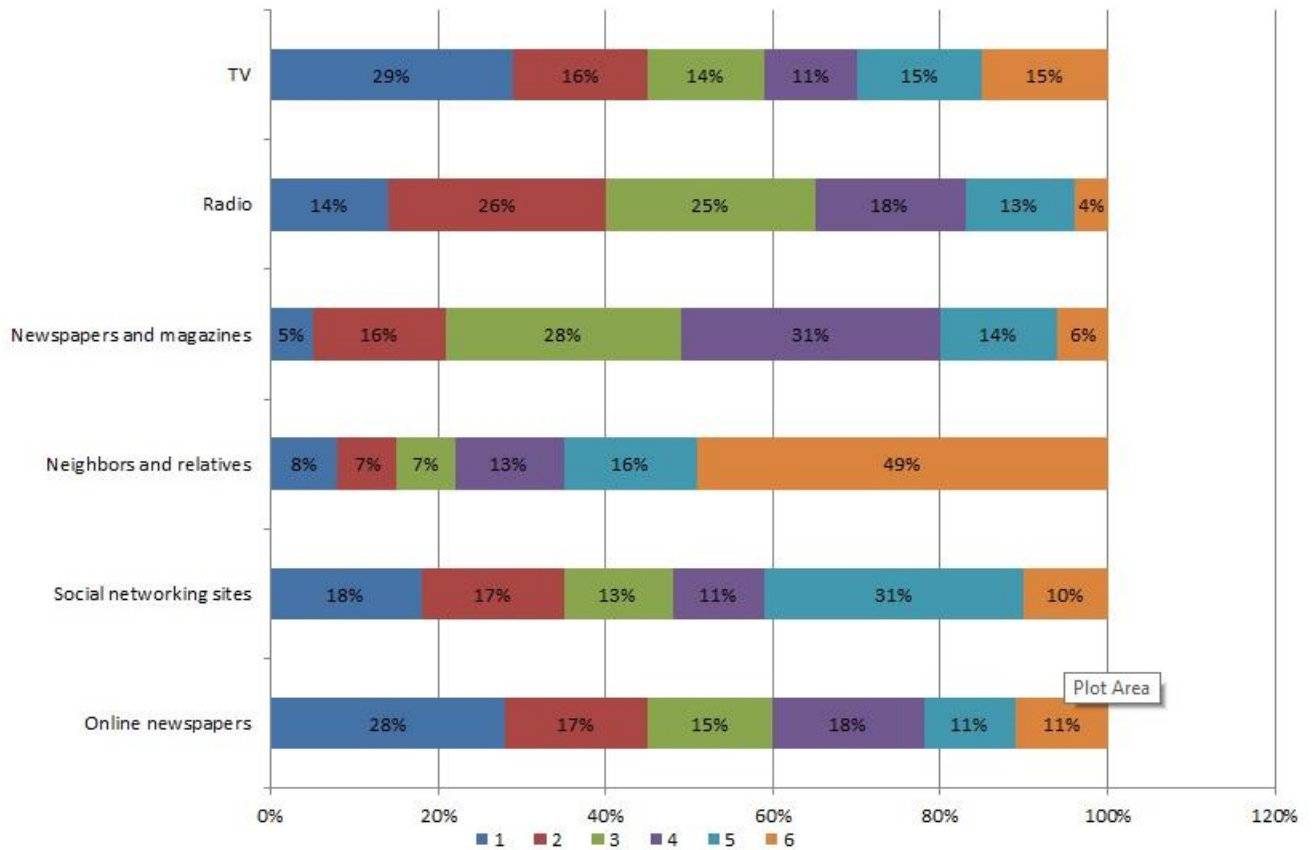
Trust towards news sources

The online survey included 236 responses where the mean age of the participants is 27.8. The gender of the participants is not divided proportionally (31.3% male, 68.6% female), while the residence of the respondents is distributed evenly (48.73% from Yerevan, 46.6% from regions, while 4.6% are from diaspora). Another important point to note about the demographics of the respondents is that the majority are students and employed people (47.6% and 40.6% accordingly) and 98% of the survey takers are registered on at least one social networking site. Another important demographic information is that 47.5% of the survey takers are students, 40.7% are employed people, 6.4% are unemployed, 1.3% are retired and 4.2% indicated that they are both working and studying.

One of the main goals of the previously conducted USAID survey in Armenia in 2011 was to find the level of trust of the Armenians towards different news sources. As it was mentioned above the most reliable sources were national TV channels and neighbors, friends and relatives, while online media was on the last place, as the majority didn't know about it.

As the results of this online survey show, respondents arranged the information sources in the following order: (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Please, arrange the following news sources from the most reliable to the least (1 as the most reliable source, and 6 as the least reliable)



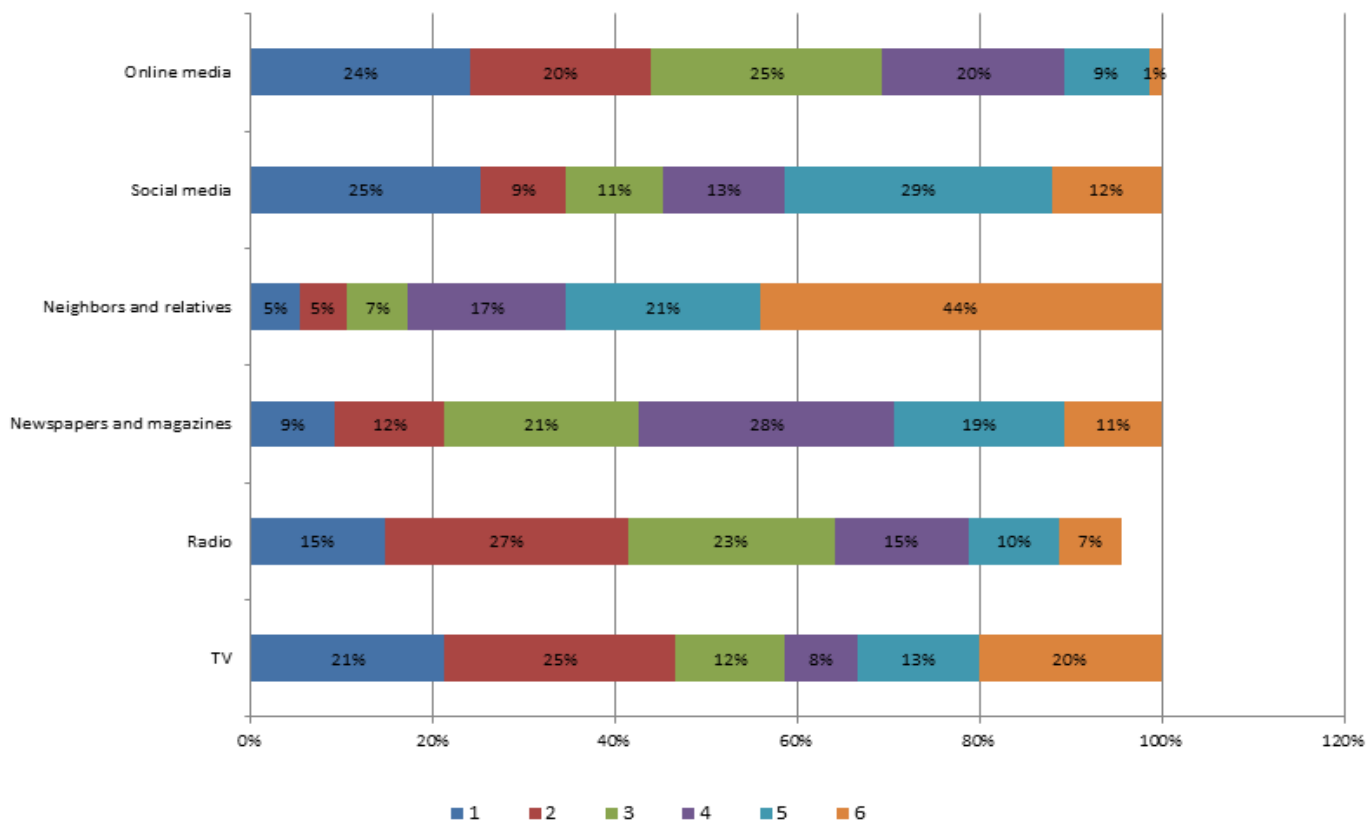
Once the results are filtered and the responses are arranged according to the participants' residence, the picture changes: TV was more common in the regions as a more reliable source (32.2% evaluated TV as the most reliable news source), while online newspapers were on the second place (21.2%). The respondents from Yerevan had the opposite picture – online newspapers were chosen as the most reliable source by 33.3% of the respondents, while TV was the second with 24.5% reliability. Another interesting finding that the online survey showed is that about 58% of student survey takers indicated TV as the most reliable news source (they ranked TV as the first or second choice), while 46% of employed people (this presupposes that their majority is older than students) have indicated online newspapers as the most reliable news source. Only 32% of the employed have ranked TV as the first and second preference. Even though we may assume

that the young generation will trust online newspapers more as they are more familiar with the online media, it turns out that they trust it less than the older generation.

Online media is on the second place, regardless of the fact that it was an online survey and the chances were high that the latter might be indicated as a reliable source. However, this hypothesis proves to be wrong when we start to analyse the results of the face-to-face surveys, as here the social media and online media are indicated as the most reliable sources.

The face-to-face surveys consisted of 75 respondents from Vanadzor, Noyemberyan, and Armenian State University of Economics. The mean age of the respondents is higher (34.1), gender of the participants are divided almost proportionally (57.3% female, 42.7% male). However, the residence and occupations are not divided proportionally (17.3% are from Yerevan, 82.7% from regions, and 30.7% are students, 50.7% are employed, 16% are unemployed, and 2.6% are retired). The picture of trust towards the news sources was different as well. The results are as follows: **(Figure 3)**

Figure 3



Thus, according to the face-to-face survey the top three most reliable news sources are social media (25% indicated as the most reliable), online media (24%) and TV (21%), while in case of the online survey those three sources were distributed in the opposite way (TV - 29%, online media - 28%, and social media 18% indicated as the most reliable news sources). As face-to-face survey had a bigger sample of older participants, the above-mentioned hypothesis that older people trust TV less than online media is being strongly supported.

The leading position of TV as a reliable news source in the two surveys is an indicator that online media is still on the process of growth and even though the majority of the Armenians already have access to it, it is still trying to catch up with the leading television. However, compared to the survey done by USAID, online media has greatly improved its positions today and has reached its availability to a wider audience.

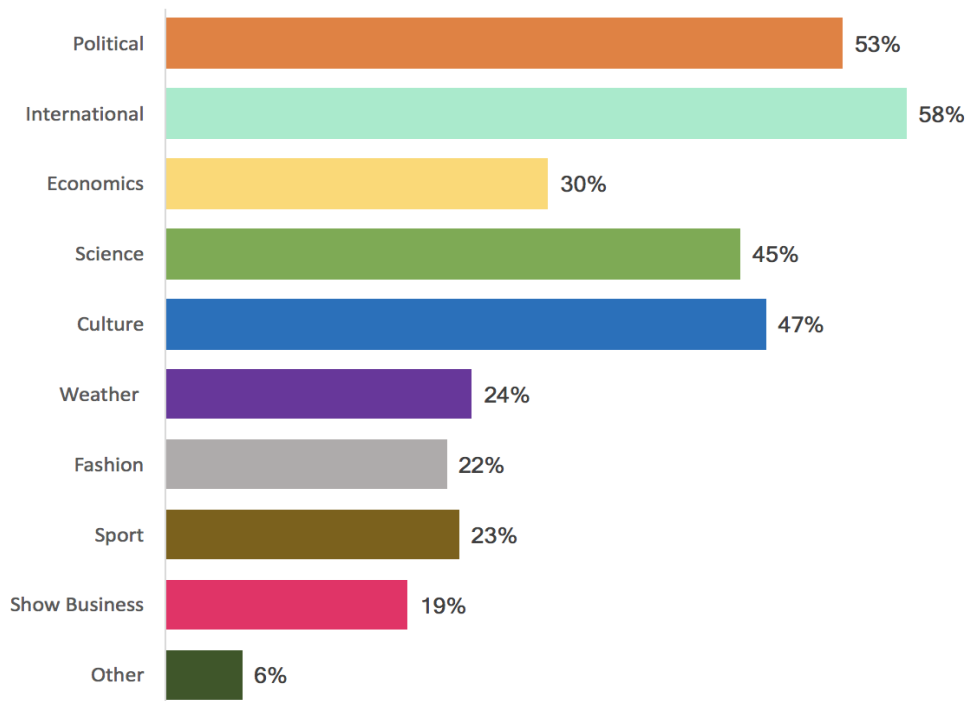
The results received from this sample drastically differ from the survey results done by USAID in Armenia for several reasons. The first reason that the results are different is the time difference, because USAID survey was conducted in 2011 and during the previous six years online media has experienced a huge rise and has changed the picture, especially in case of the option of the neighbors and relatives as the latter are ranked as the most unreliable sources in this survey. This result may be explained by the fact that six years ago when online media was much less popular in Armenia, neighbors and relatives could be one of the most available news sources. The second important reason explaining the different results is the difference of the methodology of the surveys as the USAID survey was all conducted in face-to-face format. And the final and the most important reason is the difference of the samples as the USAID survey included the whole population of Armenia.

Topic preferences

Another important finding that later, as a result of interviews with media specialists, brought to controversies is the preferences of topics. The online survey showed that the two most preferred topics for Armenian news readers are international and political news. The big picture is the following: International (58%), Political (53%), Cultural (47%), Science (45%), Economics (30%), Weather (24%), Fashion (22%),

Sport (23%), Show Business (19%), and Other (6%), which included psychology, entertainment, marketing and cuisine. **(Figure 4)**

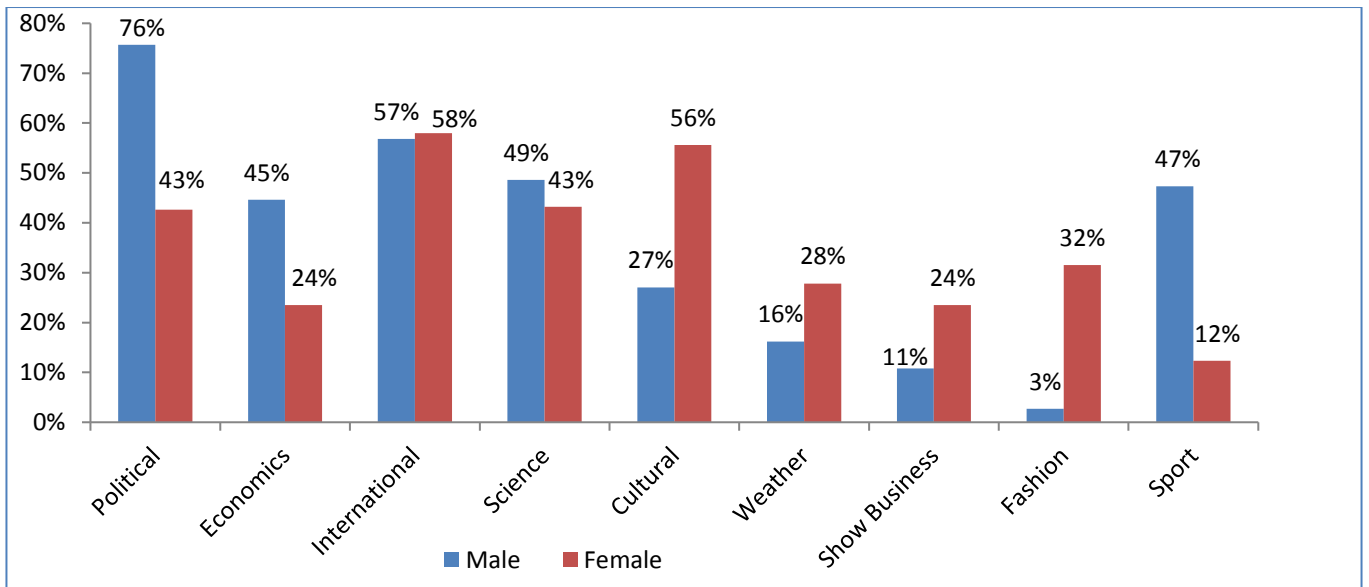
Figure 4: Which topics of online news articles do you mostly prefer to read? (you can choose up to 3 topics)



Similar results are also found in face-to-face surveys (Politics - 63%, International - 44%, Sport – 31%, Economics - 25%, Scientific - 25%, Weather - 25%, Cultural - 20%, Fashion - 17%, Show Business - 9%,).

As we divide male participants' answers from female participants' answers in the online survey, we see some differences in topic preferences. The results show the following: **(Figure 5)**

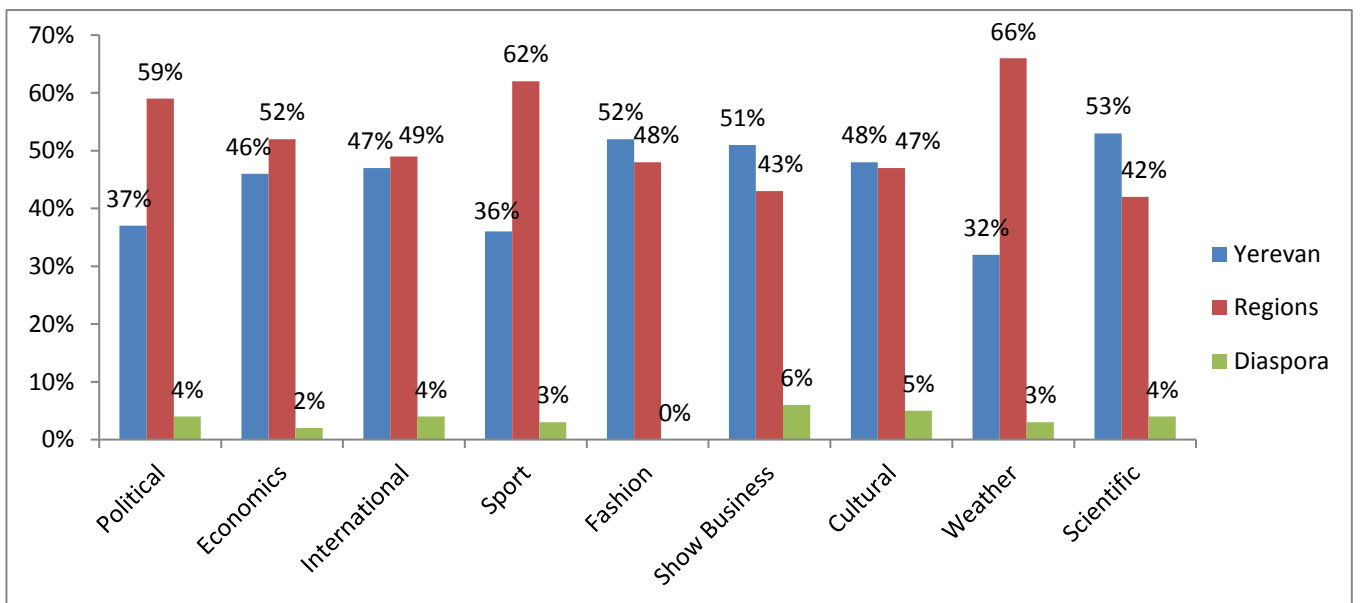
Figure 5:



As it is clear from the chart, preferences of topics drastically differ among men and women when it comes to the topics of politics, economics, culture, fashion, and sport. Even though this picture may correspond to our common assumption that women prefer to read more news about culture and fashion and men prefer sport news, this topic may still need a future research in order to find the reasons behind these preferences.

Another interesting result that the data filtering brought is the difference of topic preferences among the residents of Yerevan and regions of Armenia. The chart below (Figure 6) indicates the combined results of face-to-face and online surveys: **(Figure 6)**

Figure 6:



As the chart tells, there is a big difference of topic preference between residents of Yerevan and regions when it comes to political, sport, weather and scientific news, as more residents of regions prefer to read these topics, except the topic of science - it is more preferred by Yerevan residents. The big difference of preferences over the topic of weather can be because of the fact that people from regions are involved more in agricultural works and weather plays a very important role in the field of agriculture. However, the huge difference in the preference of political and sport news is a question that can be elaborated as a research question for a different research project.

Once we try to look at the statistics of different online newspapers, we can see that all of them have different results because each online news outlet has a certain focus on different topics and on the methodology of news delivery in general. According to the findings of an Armenian news website past.am, the most viewed topics in their websites are non-public affairs topics (Life, Entertainment, Sports, Weather). On the first place are videos, such as new music videos of Armenian singers, entertaining videos, or short videos from Armenian politicians' speeches. Concerning the popularity of international topics as the first topic preference, the editor of past.am Shushanik Grigoryan explains that those international news that are closely connected with Armenia (ex. "Vladimir Putin speaks about Armenia") have high number of views. Another important topic preference that is specifically important for Armenians are the news about Azerbaijan and the situation in the Armenian-Azerbaijani borders. Other topics are mainly dependent on the time of the day or the current situation in the country. As Grigoryan says, "The topic preferences can really differ depending on the time period. For example, several months ago, as a new prime minister was assigned and he formed his cabinet, the articles about the newly assigned ministers were one of the most viewed news pieces in our website." The topic preference can also strongly depend on the time of the day. As the online journalist from past.am Mariam Nalbandian reports the most viewed articles in the mornings are "Daily Horoscope" and "Recipe of the Day". Articles about weather are one of the few news topics that can be actively viewed through the whole day, while entertaining articles, such as videos or interviews with celebrities can be viewed more in the evenings. Articles about sex and reproductive health are also actively viewed in the evenings.

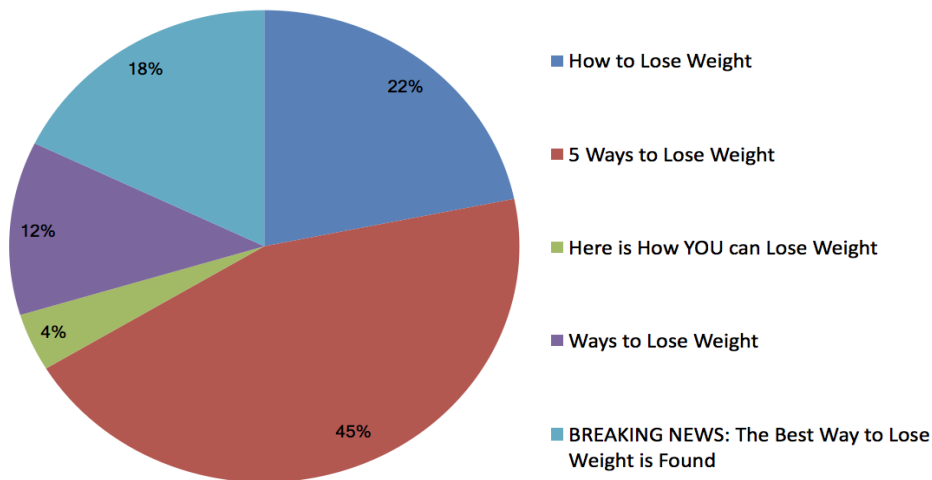
The editor of media.am Gegham Vardanyan opens up about the supply-demand mechanism of the readers and online newspapers, saying, “The editorial office can’t decide that it should publish only the topics that are interesting for the reader. It shouldn’t tell only sad stories full of blood, or it shouldn’t only tell about the lives of celebrities. The news outlets must always experiment with their readers. They should create a two-way communication with the readers through reading their comments in social media and in their websites in order to find out what they want, but at the same time they should try to adopt new approaches and new formats. Sometimes they will be successful, sometimes they won’t. Of course, the online news outlet has to give the readers what they want, but it doesn’t mean that it should give up on all the other topics. It is pretty much like a fast food restaurant – you can’t always give the customers fast food. In your menu you should always have salads, soups, and many other meals aside from fast food.”

Gegham Vardanyan emphasizes the most common manipulative method that press clubs implement in order to direct the readers’ attention to lighter topics at some periods of time when the country is in certain political situations. For instance, press clubs form a certain “artificial” agenda of such press conferences that are aimed to make the editors “lazy” by burdening them with not important topics and preventing the editorial boards from having their own investigations and finding other important news pieces. Therefore, the fact that online news readers give preference to certain topics can be the result of the maneuvers of press clubs and editorials rather than the direct communication of the readers and journalists.

Headline preferences

Online and face-to-face surveys contained a question with five headlines on the same topic where the headlines differ in the technique of writing – the first headline was written with a “How to” expression (“How to Lose Weight”), the second one contained numbers (“5 Ways to Lose Weight”), third one had a reader-addressing (“Here is How YOU can Lose Weight”), fourth one had a simple structure (“Ways to Lose Weight”), and the fifth one was more sensational (“BREAKING NEWS: The Best Way to Lose Weight is Found”). The online survey shows that the readers prefer headlines with numbers for this kind of topic. The results are the following: (**Figure 7**)

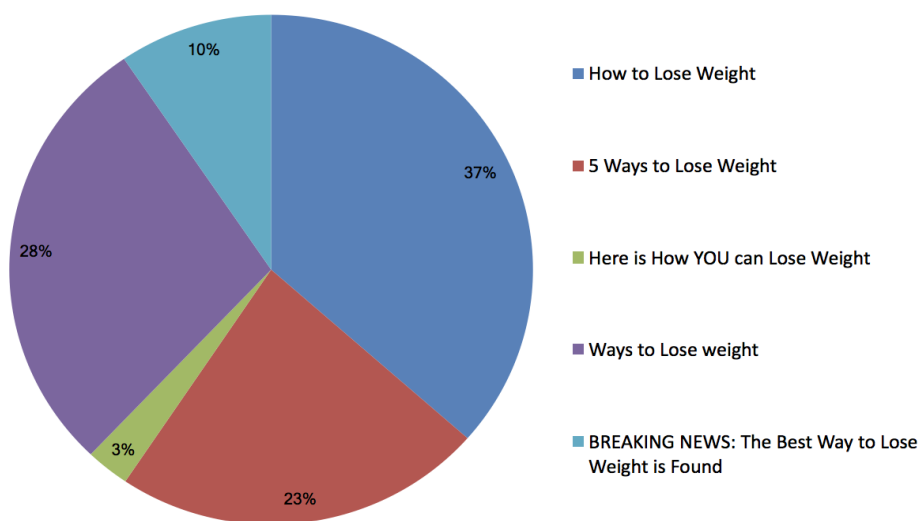
Figure 7: Which headline is more appealing for you? (Online survey)



As the chart indicates, the headlines with numbers are absolute leaders (45%), which is followed by the headlines with “How to” expression (22%), headlines with “Breaking news” expression (18%), simple headlines (12%) and reader-addressing (4%).

The results of this question differ from the results of face-to-face survey, as in the latter the headlines with “How to” expression are the leaders (**Figure 8**)

Figure 8: Which headline is more appealing for you? (Face-to-face survey)



Simple headlines were on the second place (28%), while the headlines with numbers were only the third (23%). Headlines with “Breaking news” expression and reader-addressing were the least preferred with 10% and 3% preference respectively.

As it was mentioned above, these headlines are effective and applicable in case of soft news. However, in case of hard news Samvel Martirosyan states that the most common clickbait headlines in Armenia are the ones that contain “Breaking News” and “Scandal” expressions, or the headlines that are incomplete (ex. “...what happens later you will see while reading the article”), or they are formulated as questions where the most important information is hidden (ex. Who started the fight at the polling station?). Martirosyan says, “Armenian online news readers don’t differ from other readers. The only difference that’s present between the Armenian readers and the European news readers is that we read more political news. In other aspects, it is globally accepted that the readers like sensational and appealing headlines, which eventually have the opposite effect on the content and quality of the article.

Another factor that leads to the decrease of the quality of content, specifically the quality of headlines in the Armenian online media, is the strong dependency of the online news outlets from social media, particularly Facebook. Samvel Martirosyan adds, “Because most of the online news readers get the news from social networking sites rather than from directly visiting the online newspapers, the latter try to be as appealing to the reader as possible in order to attract their attention and make them click on the article that they see in their news feed. And, of course, in this case the online news outlets are working on making appealing headlines, instead of making a high-quality content. Also by focusing on making the headlines more available through social media they don’t concentrate on making their articles more easily available through browser search, which is much more important and needs a special approach.”

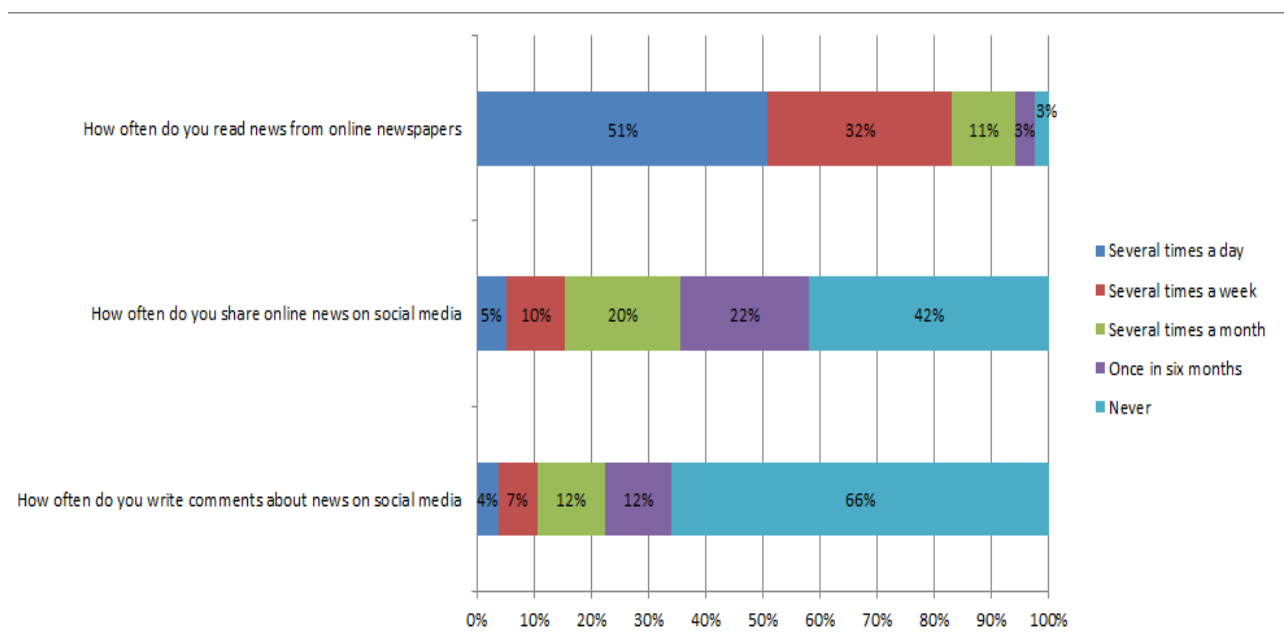
Reading habits of the Armenian online news readers

Online and face-to-face surveys were also aimed to find out the activity of the Armenian online news readers. As it may be predicted the overwhelming majority of the online news readers have indicated Facebook as the main platform for news sharing (82%). Twitter was on the second place (2,5%), while the

other social networking sites had insignificant share in the survey. Similar results are also present in the face-to-face survey.

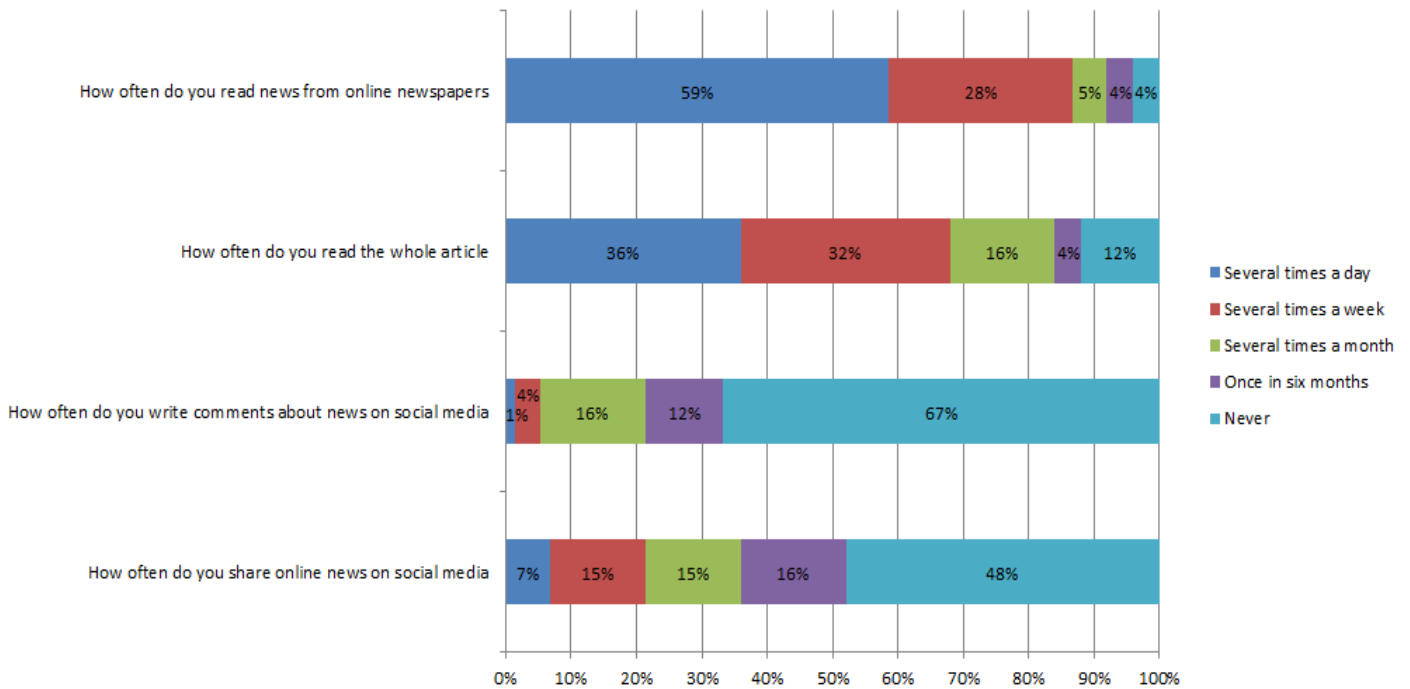
Online survey also contained three questions that asked how often the readers read news from online newspapers, how often they comment on the news on social media and how often they share the news on social media. The face-to-face survey had the same three questions and in addition to that it also asked how often the participants read the whole article when they click the news article or when they read the headline. The online survey results show the following picture: **(Figure 9)**

Figure 9:



As the chart indicates, 51% of the online survey participants read online newspapers several times a day. However, when we compare with the questions (how often they comment on news or share the news) the activity decreases abruptly, as only about 4% comment and 5% share news several times a day. These results show that even though the online readers are quite active and they follow the news, they don't prefer to share their opinion about the news which can have different reasons. The same low activity was also found in the results of the face-to-face survey. As mentioned above, the face-to-face survey had an additional question about how often the online readers read the whole article. The results are as follows **(Figure 10):**

Figure 10:



Here the picture is the same, as again more than half of the participants read online news several times a day, but only a negligible percentage of them usually share and comment. As we try to correlate the participants' age with their activity, it turns out that the older the participants, the more often they share news on social media. Another interesting finding from the face-to-face survey was the fact that even though 59% of the participants read news several times a day, only 36% of them read the whole article. This presupposes that the participants mostly read only the lead of the article or the headline, which in many cases can be very confusing and can misdirect the reader. Therefore, this behavior can be a warning for us, as it can lower the quality of the community of the online news readers. The concept of community of readers is introduced by media.am. As Gegham Vardanyan and Samvel Martirosyan state one of the most important factors for having a good online media field is to form a good community of readers through teaching media literacy. The latter is a special course taught at schools in different countries. Martirosyan says, "The most effective way to form a good community of readers is through teaching media literacy at schools and other educational institutions because in any other cases, the teaching remains incomplete, as, after all, the journalist's function is not teaching."

Problems of Armenian Online Media

Dependency of Online News Outlets

Social media and information analyst, member of Internet governance in Armenia Samvel Martirosyan states that today's Armenian online newspapers have many problems and in order to sustain themselves, the online news outlets strongly follow the readers' preferences in order to sustain themselves which leads to the decrease of the quality of the content. However, Martirosyan also adds that most of the Armenian online newspapers have the third dictating force besides the readers and the editors - they are the owners of the outlets from whom the news outlets are dependent both financially and politically.

This can be one of the main reasons that online media is still not the leading news source in Armenia. Both Gegham Vardanyan and Samvel Martirosyan mention that Armenian online newspapers are not financially independent, self-sufficient, and they can't work as a business model. Another problem that derives from the previously-mentioned ones is the close link of social networking sites and online news outlets. Gegham Vardanyan explains the core of the problem. He says, "Online newspapers can track how the users visit their website. The first way is the direct, that is, the internet users directly type the name of their news outlet and visit the website. The second way comes from a browser search, like Google, Bing etc. That's an organic search. And the third way is social networking sites. The most valuable and profitable way out of these three is the direct traffic. The more direct traffic you have, the more loyal audience you have as an online newspaper. In case of browser search and social networking site you can, for example, pay Google or the social media and have more traffic to your website. However, that traffic is temporary – it will abruptly decrease if you don't pay. The problem is that in Armenia there is a very strong dependency on social networking sites, which makes online newspapers more vulnerable. This means that if the online news readers decrease their visit to social networking sites, the visits to the online news outlets decrease as well. Anyway, social networking sites can have advantages (not necessarily if you pay the social networking site) and can help the online newspapers only if they provide not more than 50% of traffic." Therefore, the close link between online newspapers and social networking sites can create both problems and positive outcomes. The problem of too high traffic from social media leads to a chain reaction which eventually

results to the decrease of the quality of news pieces. As social media is the easiest way to bring traffic to their website (because the number of social network users has increased) online newspapers have entered into a competition in social media, specifically in Facebook. Because of this competition online news outlets focus on the speed of news supply which affects the quality of the articles. Eventually, the journalists focus not on the article itself but on the headline, as the more attractive and sensational the headline is, the more views it will provide. This method certainly damages the content of the journalistic piece as those headlines are constructed with the use of unnecessary and false information. Maria Titizian explains that the major reason that the news outlets take this step is to have more advertisers who will pay them. Titizian states, “Online news outlets do this because they are strapped for money. They need advertisers and they should show them that they have visitors. This brings to the deterioration of most journals that we see today.”

Lack of Twitter Users

Twitter is a leading social networking site that is deeply focusing on political and international news happening all over the world. This is the platform that the presidents and other leading figures of the countries and widely known powerful institution leaders have their accounts and share their opinions and positions about the news happening around the world. In other words, Twitter can be considered a very effective way to reach to the international audience and be recognized. However, according to the online survey and face-to-face surveys, only 2.83% and 2.7 % of Armenians share news on Twitter accordingly. The media experts of Armenia mention that Twitter doesn't develop in Armenia because of several reasons. The main reason that Martirosyan brings is the incompatibility of the Armenian language and the format of Twitter. Armenian words don't have many abbreviations and the Armenian words are 1.5 to 2 times longer, but as Twitter puts a format of 140 symbols only, it becomes very difficult for an Armenian user to fit his or her thoughts in 140 symbols. Aside from that comes the cultural reason. Titizian says, “We don't know how to be brief, we don't know how to beat to the point, and we don't understand the value of it. It is linguistic and cultural. We think that with Facebook posts the whole world will see us, but that's not the case. But Twitter is what the world global leaders and reporters are using.” Titizian also adds the fact that we still can't properly use the hashtags. Besides that, the Armenian Twitter users tweet in Armenian which apparently doesn't reach to the international audience.

Lack of Media Literacy

The next problem that the media specialists mention is the online journalists' lack of professionalism. They bring up several reasons for the lack of professionalism. The first reason is that the future journalists are not taught how to use social media and how to be online journalists. Titizian emphasizes this problem by claiming that most of journalism lecturers in the Armenian higher education institutions graduated in the 1970s and are not used to technologies. Therefore, the responsibility of teaching falls only on the editors. On the other hand, Titizian claims that the experienced journalists tend to write pieces that are more editorial and express their opinion. However, usually the people confuse the opinion pieces with the reality; therefore, Titizian advises to develop the discourse with the people and help them to differentiate the editorial pieces from the reality. The second reason that media specialists mention is that the journalists don't read and are not media literate enough. They not only don't read news but also literature. Titizian states, "We don't even know our recent history that made such an impact on media and political landscapes...they {today's journalists} do not have enough knowledge about the world. Today the journalists make such mistakes that are unacceptable. They don't have proper guidance, but at least they should write people's names right and should be well-informed about the things happening around the world."

In addition to that, Gegham Vardanyan mentions more specific factors and skills that today's Armenian journalists don't possess – those are the perfect knowledge of Armenian, the ability to correct oneself, a good knowledge of English and Russian, reading more and being very active on social media. Vardanyan also notices that the Armenian online news articles usually fail to give complete and comprehensive information to the reader. In other words, the online journalist doesn't give the reader the context or the background of the news by presupposing that the reader already knows it.

The lack of media literacy also concerns to the readers. As it was mentioned above, educational institutions in Armenia don't have special courses for media literacy, and, apparently, there is a need for that. As the media experts state, Armenian online news readers are not media literate and savvy enough to be able to effectively navigate in online media and be able to differentiate the wrong and manipulative information from the right one. Maria Titizian stresses the current situation of the media literacy saying,

“Today it is very difficult for an average person, for an average 18-year-old to understand the online media field and propaganda machine... We are living in an age that is inundated by media. It is everywhere. If our children are going to be able to navigate the world, not only news, they need to understand how to use technological tools that they are not being taught.”

Contradictions

As the research project consisted of surveys with Armenian online news readers and interviews with media specialists, during the process of analysing the results some contradicting opinions and survey results came to sight.

One of the strongest contradictions that the research came across is the results of topic preferences of the Armenian online news readers and the opinions of media experts. According to the online and face-to-face surveys the most preferred topics for the Armenian news readers are Political and International news. However, the media experts, journalists and the editor of past.am news website claim that political and especially international news are not one of the most popular topics among Armenian online news readers. Past.am editor Shushanik Grigoryan states that very comprehensive and analytical political articles are one of the least viewed news pieces in their website. The popularity of a political news mainly depends on the time period (ex. Parliamentary elections, new positions in the government) and the content and format of the news, that is, whether it is a video, or is a short article and has an appealing headline with a humorous remark. In other cases as Martirosyan mentions the Armenian online news readers don't differ from the foreign readers – the most preferred topics are usually sex, crime and death. It is worth mentioning that this result received from the online and face-to-face surveys may be dependent on several reasons. Firstly, the survey did not include the whole population of Armenia, and there can be chances that the sample does not completely represent the population. The second reason may be because the participants' responses were not honest.

The media experts' opinions about other aspects of the Armenian online media almost all coincided to each other except in the case of the current role of Twitter and Facebook in the Armenian online media.

Maria Titizian states that the algorithms that Facebook uses in creating our news feed is “dictating” to us what to watch and read, and therefore, it shapes our worldview, while Twitter doesn’t use such algorithm by giving us freedom to read all the publications of the people and organizations which we are following without any filtering. On the other hand, Gegham Vardanyan sees Facebook algorithm of news filtering as a positive phenomenon and doesn’t consider it a dictating method, because, after all, Facebook creates our news feed based on our likes and views of a certain page. Vardanyan states that Twitter is not growing not only in Armenia but all over the world. However, unlike Maria Titizian, who states that we don’t know how to use proper hashtags and can’t use the platform, Gegham Vardanyan says that even though the Armenian audience in Twitter is much smaller and the number of users is not growing, hashtags have gained a popularity in Armenia and have been used at different important events in Armenia (such as #electricyerevan, #NKPeace, #ArmGenocide, #armvote2017). The several points that all of the media experts agreed on are that Twitter is not fitted for Armenian language because of its limited characters (Armenian words are longer compared to English, and there are fewer abbreviations in Armenian). Even though this problem can be solved by writing shorter, cultural aspects come to sight as it is very common among Armenians to write and express their ideas in longer sentences. And, the final problem that is worth mentioning is the poor knowledge of English as Twitter can be a very good platform for Armenian online news readers, politicians and journalists to reach the foreign audience.

The main contradiction that the research came across is the denial of the common assumption that if the young generation is more familiar to the online media and uses it much more often than the older generation, then they would indicate online media as a more reliable news source than TV and other news sources. Eventually, the results showed the opposite picture – as it was mentioned above 58% of the students indicated TV as a first and second preference, while only 32% of the employed people indicated TV as a first and second preference. This outcome can be described by different reasons. One of them can be the fact that besides seeing unbiased and true information in online media young people also come across with a huge amount of fake information in online media which may have made them distrust that news source. Another reason for such outcome can be the lack of media literacy which media experts highly emphasized

during the interviews and stressed the importance of teaching media literacy. However, finding the true reason for such a result may be a topic for a future research.

Conclusion

The general picture of the research showed that Armenian online media and its readers both have similarities with the global picture of online media and also have some specific characteristics that are present only in Armenia. Similarities are mainly present in the field of topic and headline preferences. As Samvel Martirosyan stated Armenian online news readers do not differ from European readers as for both of them the main topic preferences are crime, sex and entertainment, with one exception that in addition to that Armenian news readers read more political news (the topic preferences of foreign online news readers are discussed by a blogger Nathan Safran mentioned in the literature review). In terms of headline preferences the Armenian and international audiences are similar – the more sensational the headline, the more views it has. In case of the technique of headline writings both the blogger Nathan Safran's findings and the survey's results done in Armenia coincide – headlines with numbers are more preferable in case of soft news. Another important phenomenon that can be considered global is the reading habits of online media users. The results of the survey indicated that in Armenia as well there is a tendency of reading only the headlines and the lead sentences of the articles rather than the whole article. This phenomenon definitely has a negative effect on the perception of the events as the headlines are usually sensationalized for the sake of a good traffic to the news website.

Aside from the similarities with the online media activity of other countries Armenian online media also has some specific characteristics, which can be considered more as problems and drawbacks. The main problems that the Armenian online media face are the unprofessional online journalists, dependency of the online newspapers on social media, low quality of the news pieces and not active readers. It is especially important to emphasize the strong dependency of Armenian online newspapers from Facebook, and the inactivity of both their readers and journalists on Twitter.

Overall the Armenian online media is considered a free media in Armenia and is the second most influential news source in Armenia after television. This point was supported both by the survey where the participants indicated their trust to different news sources and the media expert Gegham Vardanyan.

As we compare this survey with previously conducted surveys a tendency towards online media use is obvious, as now a larger part of the population has access to the Internet and can be introduced to the same news from different perspectives as the Armenian online media provides a range of online newspapers with different political orientations and ideologies. This diversity can help the readers to be able to navigate the media, learn to differentiate the truth from a lie and have a right to make their own choices. In other words, the Armenian online news readers have the opportunity to get true and unbiased information from different sources, but the main problem that prevents us from having an ideal community of online news readers is the lack of media literacy which is present both among the Armenian online journalists and the readers. All the media experts interviewed for this research emphasized the importance of it as only through education we will be able to differentiate the truth from a lie and will easily orientate in the media alone. And finally, by being media literate we will become more self aware and won't be manipulated by the special strategies of social media and many online news outlets.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The research project had several limitations and surprising outcomes that can become a ground for future research.

The biggest drawback that this research has is the sampling of the surveys. The fact that the online survey was mainly spread through Facebook, limits the possibility that the online news readers not registered on social media or using another social networking site may take the survey. The online survey also is not proportionate in age and gender as it was mainly dominated by young people and female participants. However, the face-to-face survey came to help as it included more male participants, older people and online news readers who are not registered on any social networking site. These two surveys in some ways helped each other to create a balance and have a more representative sample.

As in any other surveys, this survey as well included incomplete questionnaires or answers that didn't correspond to the requirements of the question. Fortunately, there was not a big amount of incomplete questionnaires which indicates that the instructions were clear to the participants and they were eager to answer them. The question that was left blank the most was the question of age. As it was defined as an open-ended question 21 people (about 9% of the online survey takers) have not answered that question in the online survey. Another question that was not answered or the answer to it was incomplete was the question on the trust to different news sources (4% of the participants). The remaining questions are all answered completely.

The survey and research brought to some interesting findings which can become topics for later research. One of them is the fact that younger people indicated TV as more reliable news source than online and social media, while older participants did the opposite. Another finding was the difference of topic preferences among men and women (Figure 5) and residents of Yerevan and regions (Figure 6). As this research project was not aimed to find the reasons why people trust a particular news source or why the topic preferences are different depending on gender and residence, these findings can become a platform for a future research. Also learning from the drawbacks of this survey the future researches can include a larger scope of the population with more detailed and multi-layered questions.

The most important factor about the researches in the field of online media and its readers is that both the readers and the online media itself change rapidly, as the latter is a new platform for news sharing and it is the fastest growing one, which means that the studies in the field of online media may become out-of-date after one or two years. This means that the researchers should always catch up with the change and have the picture of the current situation of online media as every new research will bring interesting and surprising findings.

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Appendices

Appendix A

This is the translated version of the questionnaire. The original version of the questionnaire is in Armenian.

1. Your age _____
2. Your gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Currently you are
 - a. Student
 - b. Employed
 - c. Unemployed
 - d. Retired
 - e. Other _____
4. Your residence
 - a. Yerevan
 - b. Region
 - c. Diaspora
5. Please arrange the following news sources from the most reliable to the least (1 as the most reliable source and 6 as the least reliable)

___ TV
___ Radio
___ Neighbors and relatives
___ Newspapers and magazines
___ Social media
___ Online media
6. Are you registered in any social networking site (Facebook, Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, Twitter or other social networking sites)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Please answer the following questions,

	Several times a day	Several times a week	Several times a month	Once in six months	Never
How often do you read news from online					

newspapers?					
How often do you share online news on social media?					
How often do you write comments about news on social media					
How often do you read the whole article?					

8. On which social networking site do you usually share news?

- a. Facebook
- b. Twitter
- c. Vkontakte
- d. Odnoklassniki
- e. Other _____

9. Which topics of online news articles do you mostly prefer to read? (you can choose up to three topics)

- a. Political
- b. Economics
- c. International
- d. Science
- e. Cultural
- f. Weather
- g. Show Business
- h. Fashion
- i. Sport
- j. Other _____

10. Which headline is more appealing for you?

- a. How to Lose Weight
- b. 5 Ways to Lose Weight
- c. Here is How YOU can Lose Weight
- d. Ways to Lose Weight
- e. BREAKING NEWS: The Best Ways to Lose Weight Found

Appendix B

Transcript of the interview with Maria Titizian

1. What is the role of Armenian online media and how did it develop in Armenia? How will you evaluate today's role of online media it? And what can it learn from international ones?

I think we were a little late coming into online media, sort of, platform using the internet and I think with the great accessibility of the internet and actually the great quality of the Internet that we have in Armenia, that has exponentially... exhilarated certain news organizations' presence in life. If we compare internet accessibility to Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, these are places where I actually have been and it's been awful (laughing). We are lucky that we have such fast access. I could not have an access to my gmail account when I was in Iran, it was impossible, because they have scramblers so that people can't access social media platforms.

I think that the biggest problem that we have is not so much online news platforms as the social media networks that have distorted on large of what is out there that is available online. It is also a reflection of the poor quality of journalism. So you can have all of the fancy websites and you can pay a lot of money to build a really good, interactive, user-friendly website, but if the content is the same as it was or as it is in their print versions, then this is where the problem is I think. I am seeing a lot of news organizations have embraced internet media and they realized that this is the way to go, especially if they want to appeal the younger demographic. When I was at CivilNet for example, our demographic, the highest was between 18 and 25. That's what we wanted because we felt that they were the change agents in Armenia and that was the target we wanted and with each age group, it diminished, the viewership. In the last year I haven't been working I don't know but I suspect that it is still the same. So I think that the problem isn't so much the fact that they haven't realized that the Internet is a very important platform, I think that the quality and the content of the journalism hasn't caught up as yet. You know we'll see sometimes "Shtap" [in Armenian, meaning "Breaking news"], "Breaking News", those are things you never click on, those are called click baits. And then they use the Internet to lure more people and this is a very important point, they do it because they want to show their advertisers that they have traffic to their website. Because what do people wanna read about? They want to read the Breaking news, the Shtap, they wanna see maybe the lighter pieces, because sometimes people don't wanna read about politics, the economy is very difficult to understand, so they put these "թեթև" [light] articles to direct more traffic to their websites. And they do that because they are strapped for money, and cash and they need advertisers and they should show advertisers that they have many visitors, and that again plays into the deterioration or the mediocre parpolity of most journals that we are seeing today.

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having such a close link between social media and online newspapers?

Look, today in any legacy newspaper around the world, any internet, sort of online, digital publication, I don't know the figures globally, but I know in Armenia, the waste majority of traffic that comes to any website comes via Facebook. They don't actually type in in their browser "Azatutyun", or "CivilNet" or "Hetq", because everybody is using their Facebook news feed as a source of news, right? So, they are going to your website via social media. So, the importance of social media is, I can't stress it enough, the problem with social media is that people oftentimes just read the headlines, they are not reading the content, there is a lot of fake news, there is, because of

the lack of media literacy in our country and one thing I tell my students all the time is whether you are looking for Armenian news or international news, you cannot rely on one news source. In Armenia if you want to get an idea what the reality is you have to read a radical opposition publication, you have to read a very pro-government publication, like armenpress, and you have to read something in between. When you read all three then you get the sense of what the reality is, because everybody's perspectives come from such viewpoint is so varying and it's about how they present the news, right?

But, getting back to the question of social media, it is a very important tool and yet because we don't understand the nuances and we are not media literate yet or savvy enough to understand, it becomes a problem. To give you an example – every class the first 10-15 minutes are devoted to the news around the world – what's going on in the world, what's going on in Armenia, what's going on in the region, who wrote what, who said what? So a student says to me, “I just read that the Pope has said that he believes in the big bang theory”. I know I had looked at the news in the morning and hadn't seen something like that and it didn't look familiar. And I said, “Where did you read it?” and she said, “Whatever” and right at the class I checked, I google-newsed it and it was an article from two years ago. So, somebody has just shared it on Facebook and she thought that it was a new information because she didn't bother to click the article to see that it was written in 2014. So, again, everything comes down to the fact that we don't understand how to use social media, we also don't understand that Facebook has specific algorithm - depending on the sites that you are going to, depending on the links that you've clicked on, it determines for you what you see oftentimes. And so again I refer to them, when you follow the news feed at the Women's March, just to be very relevant, just 10 days ago, there something that I would really like to see your news feed because I click on things or I follow news organizations that were brought on the news. If you're looking at how to, you know, draw an eyebrow, or the last videogame, your news feed is going to be different from mine. And they don't understand this. So, what is the most powerful medium, it's dictating to them what they are seeing, reading and hearing, and, thereby, their perception of the world.

3. How is it possible to stop the flow of the wrong information in Armenian online media?

Look, this is a new technology. News has been around for forever, right? Starting from the Romans' square where they would put up, you know, announcements of the government. News has always existed. The way we tell the news has always existed – the technology now has changed a bit of that, but we don't necessarily know how to navigate that technology, *how to use it in our thing*. There will be people who will use this technology to *spread feed* news. We found out during April war many Azerbaijani, there were a lot of news sites that you thought were Armenian but in fact the propaganda machine that the Azerbaijani government *used*, many people were sharing it until Samvel Martirosyan, if you remember, kept telling people, “Ժողովուրդ ջան [People], don't follow these news sites. This is all propaganda.” So this is a very difficult thing for the average person, for the average 18-year-old to understand, so, that's why I... a policy recommendation that I would make is that we need to teach media literacy. It has to be a part of our public education curricula. We are living in an age that is inundated by media. It is accessible through Iphones, Ipads – it's everywhere. If our children are gonna be able to navigate the world, not only news, everything, they need to understand how to use these technological tools that they are not being taught. So this is one thing that I recommend to the Ministry of Education.

4. Why isn't Twitter popular in Armenia as a social platform for news sharing?

I'll tell you why. It is very simple. Because Twitter has a limit of 140 characters. We Armenians can't stick to 140 characters. We need a 1400 character. We don't know how to be brief, we don't know how to beat to the point, we don't understand the value of it. I think it's linguistic-cultural. For example, in Turkey, which is a neighboring country, Twitter is king, or queen, whatever. In Armenia we see very few people, who are very active on Twitter. I mean, yeah, a lot of people are. I get online news from Twitter. I don't follow Facebook. I follow those organizations that I want to follow, um, and I get all of my news through Twitter and I make all of my students to get Twitter accounts, so that we are gonna storify, because it's short, its to the point and, yeah, there are fake things here as well, but Facebook is just a խառնարան [mess]. It has become especially in our reality. I think there are so many fake things going on. And the best way to get to the world is, look, reporters use Twitter to get information. We think that with Facebook posts the whole world will see us, NO. It is a very important tool for us as Armenia is a small nation to use this platforms if we wanna get news out to the world. This is what all the world global leaders and reporters are using. But, unfortunately, we don't do it. We don't know how to do the proper hashtags, we don't know how to use the platform, we do it in Armenian. You know, ok, fine, you can do the tweet in Armenian, but who is your audience? Who are you trying to get to?

5. How would you evaluate the young Armenian online journalists? Are they qualified enough to navigate media?

They are not being taught that [how to use social media], because some of their journalist lecturers are from 1970s. Incredible! I am all about using those technologies. This is so important. The only responsibility is on editors to train them to get them to workshops, to make them understand the importance of networking. We live in an echo chamber. We don't cooperate with the world. We don't talk to the world. We talk to ourselves. That's why if we want... We have issues today, we are not like Slovenia. We have an unresolved issue like Kharabakh, we have four borders closed. You know what I am saying? If we want to enter international world, you know we say "The world has forgotten us!" Because we haven't kept up with the world. We don't talk with the world. Media, journalists, social media – all these technologies give us the opportunity to talk with the world and yet we don't. We are this "echo chamber" մենք մեզ հետ ենք խոսում, վայ-վայ, վոյ-վոյ ենք անում [we are talikng to ourselves].

6. How would you evaluate the Armenian online news readers?

I think today the youth are not reading the news. I am almost convinced of it. I mean, if my students are the reflection of it, they know that they should read, and yet still they don't. So, and if they do follow the news, they usually look at headlines, just trying to get a sense of what's going on. I think there is a problem of lack of interest. I think they have been so *worn down* by whatever goes in Armenia that they don't care about the processes taking place around the world. There is an interesting *study* - it shows a decline in the desired watched videos. So more people are now going back to written text, that's not hard statistics, that's an interesting thing to find out, for me I don't like to watch videos, those 60 second short videos that give you some, but if I am gonna read about, for example, what's taking place in Cyprus, you know there are talk taking place about possible reunification of Cyprus. I prefer to read an article, because I can quickly scan it, see what's important, what I wanna read, but with the video, you have to sit there and jump forward, you might

miss something, and then go back. So, I think there is a tendency toward the written sort of material again, but I can't be sure.

And the older people just don't use the internet. I mean that's the problem.

7. What would you say about the trust of the Armenian media users towards TV?

Parents still watch television and we listen to our parents. The TV is always on. Any Armenian house you walk in the TV is on. In our house it's never on. I use it only when I am tired of using computer. But it's always on, and because that's what they indicate as trustworthy. And I think that we could show them that there is no independent TV station in Armenia, there is not one. One is Gagik Tsarukyan's. They recently made a film about him, and his life on Kentron TV. Other TV stations even though not directly but subdirectly they are controlled. So, what is the message? Who is controlling the message today in Armenia? This is a huge dilemma. Because if I only use online media and I don't watch television, I have one perception of Armenian reality. If I watch only television, I only have one perception. If I have only H1 I see Armenia as a great place to be. It IS a great place to be, but Armenia has a lot of problems and sometimes they don't show all the issues, right? Look, if it wasn't for online media, all these civic movements would not have been covered. Remember Mashtots park movement 5 years ago – not a single television station was covering. It was the first real civic action – they were staying there 24-hours a day and not a single TV station was covering. Back then CivilNet had just started and they didn't have live-fit equipment, they were there with their laptops, connecting through Skype, filming live what was going on and it was the first time it was being live-streamed, a movement taking place, until it got so big that finally president Sargsian himself came down with Taron Margarian to view the park, to understand what's going on, he turned around and said to Taron Margarian, “Տարոն ջան, սիրուն չի” [Taron, this is not nice.]

So then we had the 100 dram movement, and Electric Yerevan. So, online media gave resonance to these grassroots movements. Broadcast television was never reporting, or they were, they were putting their cameras in such a vantage point to people or just to complain about the disruption that the movements were having on the city, without trying to understand what the real issues were. So, online media, coming back to one of your first questions, has a huge role to play in bringing the news to the people when broadcast TV is not doing it.

8. How would you describe the connection of the journalist and the reader? Is there an effective communication between the readers and the journalists?

It's hard to say, because I think that most media outlets don't have a very good social media practice. SO, when you share a video or a news article and you get a lot of criticism, should you as a media react to that criticism? Should you respond to that criticism? If the criticism is a totally “դեղին” [yellow], do you think that they will react? They don't. Should they? Absolutely. Look, for example, if they got a fact wrong, if someone says, “Mariam jan, journalist, you said this is ...” and they present you with facts, should you not go back and fix it? Should you not say something? Of course, you should, but we don't interact with the public. Most times journalists write their stuff, and the older journalists, the more, sort of, experienced journalists, they say that they know everything and instead of writing the news, they preach or editorialize, or they give their opinions. Fine, give your opinion, but tell people, that this is your opinion and not the reality. I don't think that there isn't this discourse, there is a platform where journalists and readers, look, but if journalists are going to respond to all the comments, they don't have time to do that. But there should be a place for

discourse that's healthy, that is reflective and not reactive and that lets people say what they wanna say. Look, for example, there is one news organization called Propublica in the United States, and they do a lot of investigative journalism. They look at data, they do deep dives, they do all of this very interesting journalism and oftentimes they would through Twitter or Facebook say their readers, "Has anybody had issues with rent increases in this district. Let us know." So they reach out to the public to their readership to get news from them and to create stories from those. We don't have that kind of interaction. Everybody here thinks that they are up here [showing up] and the people are down here [showing low]. And we think that our readers are stupid and we have to tell them what to think. *"Just give me the news. I don't need your opinion."* So, I don't think that there is a good connection.

9. What advice would you give to this new generation of journalists? What to do in order not to have this picture?

To read. We don't read. And I don't mean only read the news – read literature, read fiction, read non-fiction. We don't have enough knowledge. We think we know a lot of stuff, but I am still shocked that we don't know our recent history that made such an impact on the media landscape, on the political landscape. It made changes in policy and sometimes it didn't make changes in policy. We do not have enough knowledge about the world. The example of Cyprus. I asked my students do you know where Cyprus was, some of them knew, or do you know the history of Cyprus. They kind of sort of knew that it had something to do with Turkey and Greece, but they didn't... I mean we have an unresolved conflict. If you are the future leaders of our country. If you're gonna be our future minister of defense, somebody is gonna be the future minister of foreign affairs, etc. Do we not need to know what is going on in the world? So that we know. Do we not need to know international affairs take place when there is an unresolved conflict so that we can see how it affects us. We don't do this and we are lazy. We are lazy. And I will tell you why. Most journalists, I know that they're underpaid and they're overworked and they are young. They don't have proper guidance, I get it. But when you're gonna write somebody's name, at least google it to write it correctly. Some of the things that I see, some of the errors that I see, UNACCEPTABLE. Unacceptable for a journalist. You should be so well-informed about the things going around you. So how do you put things in context if you don't know that. Recently they tore down a building in Tpagrichneri street. If you are a reporter and Mariam goes to the scene and Mariam doesn't know that there has been a huge protest at Afrikyan's, at the other building, she doesn't know that the city architect, designer, whatever, doesn't know the history, how are you gonna write an article? So what do you have? You have no context, no history, you have nothing there. You just have the information that the building was demolished. This is what our journalism today is doing in Armenia.

For example, there is hetq.am. It does fantastic work on investigative journalism. There are some sites that are trying to, you know, improve. There has been improvement, չեմ ասում, որ չկա [I am not saying that there isn't]. But sometimes I can't watch television. I don't watch broadcast news in Armenia, I cannot watch it.

10. Have you noticed the role of neighbors and relatives as news sources?

Yes, "my neighbor said, my friend said, my relative said". That's common knowledge. Something happens you say "Who told you that?" And they say, "Քավորս: Քավորս շատ լավ գիտե այս ամեն ինչը:" ["My godfather. He knows everything."] But how does he know that? Because his godfather works in one of the ministries.

We believe in rumors. Once I asked my students “Where do you think the reporters get the news? How do they find?” and somebody said “Rumors.” That’s shocking.