Internet as Public Self-Service Media: Exploring Digital Civil Society in Post-Maidan Ukraine

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This empirically driven study of Ukraine's emerging digital civil society contributes to the strand of scholarship scrutinizing the implications of the internet for democracy. It relies on the case studies of Ukraine's grassroots digital public service organisations Hromadske and StopFake in order to illustrate the affordances of digital media for co-production in public services. This paper explores why grassroots public service providers emerged in Ukraine and how they managed to achieve sustainability in 2013-2014, at the time of the severe economic crisis caused by the annexation of Crimea and the war with Russia-backed separatists. Despite the odds of resource mobilization theory, the lack of financing did not constitute a burden for civic participation in Ukraine and was circumvented by reliance on digital media and pro bono professional services. The availability of affordable and unpoliced internet coupled with a strong sense of civic duty and motivation for volunteering among citizens allowed Ukrainian 'digital activists' to produce and deliver high-quality public service on a national scale, outgrowing the state-funded public services by the number of users. It is argued that these case studies can inform policymakers beyond Ukraine about the potential of the internet for reducing unnecessary bureaucratic complexity in public service provision system, facilitating citizens' engagement in co-production and increasing the quality and efficacy of public services.

KEY WORDS: co-production, public service media, fake news, digital activism, grassroots activism

Introduction.

800 million people worldwide could lose their jobs to technology by 2030 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2017). From virtual bank branches in our mobile phones to self-service counters in supermarkets, digital technologies have already largely replaced intermediaries such as shop assistants, cashiers or bankers, which used to be the necessary connecting point between the goods and customers. Yet, can new technologies extend this 'self-service' logic to the public service provision? The case studies of Ukrainian grassroots digital civic initiatives providing free public service in information illustrates how active citizens relying on digital media can produce and distribute high quality public services on a national scale. Therefore, I posit that the case study of Ukraine can inform the New Public Management (NPM) theory by offering the empirical evidence of how 'co-production' in public service sphere can be realized.

The New Public Management doctrine emerged in late 1970 and represented a paradigmatic break with bureaucratic model of public administration in pursuit of frugality (Hood, 1991). The 2000s brought another quintessential change to the NPM thinking conceptualizing the citizens as co-producers of public value by virtue of engaging with the public services delivered by the state (O'Flynn, 2007). Contrary to the previously popular scholarly and professional argument that citizens as clients would receive more effective and efficient services delivered by professional staff employed in a large bureaucratic agency, it appeared that the empirical studies of police services in several metropolitan areas revealed that centralized bureaucratized system has, in fact, the detrimental effect on the quality of public service (Ostrom, 1999). Thus, the 2000s has given a rise to the New Public Governance thinking (Osborne, 2006) with the core focus on 'co-production' of public services by the state, market, and citizens. The concept of co-production, as Gemma Burgess and Daniel Durrant (2018) define, refers to the organised involvement of citizens in the production of public services, which can be seen as the inclusion of the citizens in the design and delivery of public services; mixing categories of consumer and producer, and offering an alternative to recent public choice approaches in which the state plays the role of producer, whilst citizens are cast purely as consumers of public services. Through the lens of the New Public Management logic with its principal focus on economy, efficiency and effectiveness, co-production is also seen as an opportunity for lowering the costs of public service production for the state and therefore is argued to be essential for sustaining the current levels of service provision in the changing economic context (Pestoff, 2006).

The technological development that accompanied the emergence of the New Public Government thinking in the 2000s has provided citizens with efficient tools to facilitate networking and collective production in various spheres of life. However, while the role of digital media for empowering the audience and fostering the 'participatory culture'[1] is being actively explored within the field of media studies[2], the segment of public policy literature discussing the potential of the internet for efficient public service delivery remains relatively

[1] The main theorist of 'participatory culture' concept Henry Jenkins (2006) defines participatory culture as one:
1. With relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. With strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others
3. With some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Where members believe that their contributions matter (not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued)
5. Where members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

[2] For detailed account of the development of participatory culture in the spheres diverging from digital media to politics, please, consult *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* by Jenkins, H, S. Ford and J. Green; *Participatory Culture In A Networked Era : A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics* by Jenkins H, Mizuko I. and boyd d., and *The Participatory Cultures Handbook edited by* Delwiche, A. and J. Henderson.

small. Yet, it provides an important theoretical consideration on how digital means can be used in order to reduce the complexity of the bureaucratic system that citizens confront in trying to access, draw on and improve public services. For example, Patrick Dunleavy (2013) noted that the organizational development in the digital era should be characterized by disintermediation, which he defines as the stripping out or slimming down of intermediaries in the process of delivering public services.

Continuing this logic, the Ukrainian case provides a real-life example of how the internet can replace the intermediaries in the process of delivering public services, becoming what I call 'public self-service media' – a medium allowing public to self-organize and self-serve public interests without the involvement from either market or the state, which were previously assumed to be the most viable producers of public services (Simon Grifiths et al., 2013: 7). In contrast, Ukrainian citizens co-produced public services on the digital platforms, relying on crowdsourcing and crowdfunding, without taking the state – or the market – into the equation at all.

In this respect, Ukraine is a very peculiar exemplar, because the state is not simply being 'challenged by groups of citizens who have as their main weapon an ability to… coordinate resources of large numbers of people' through digital media (Margetts et al. 2016: 1), as we witnessed during the Arab spring, Brazilian protests, and the Ukrainian Maidan revolution itself. Rather, the Ukrainian state is more often being supported by grassroots digital initiatives, which are working to complement the state's efforts to provide public services at a time when the state cannot effectively satisfy public needs. Therefore, Ukrainian case also contradicts Huntington's predictions that strong civil society in a weak state will lead to the collapse of the latter (Huntington, 1963). Samuel Huntington did not anticipate that in the case when the state is not providing public services, people will not necessarily exercise the pressure over the state demanding to deliver the services, but can in fact take upon themselves a part of the state's functions in order to strengthen the state as a necessary means to preserve national independence in a face of the military aggression.

The empirical base of this study is represented by Ukrainian digital civil society initiatives, which emerged from the grassroots without any coordinating organisation and subsequently developed into bottom-up public service organisations. This paper includes two case studies of Ukraine's grassroots pro bono initiatives in media sphere, the non-commercial grassroots public service media outlets *Hromadske* and *pro bono* media initiative fact-checking Russian propaganda *StopFake*. These online initiatives emerged in 2013-2014 and relied on digital media as their primary organizational means, and have been successfully securing the

necessary funding and effectively mobilizing volunteers to provide pro bono professional services for over four years. To the great surprise the resource mobilization theorists (Olson 1965), these 'public self-service organisations' became sustainable despite the dramatic lack of financial resources, naturally accompanying a deep economic crisis caused by the annexation of Crimea and an ongoing warfare with Russia-backed separatists.

So, why these grassroots public service organisations emerged and how achieved sustainability in a social environment characterized by a dramatic lack of financial resources? In order to address this research question, my study relies on qualitative content analysis and interviews with 'digital activists'. The findings suggest that the availability of affordable and unpoliced internet is instrumental to circumvent the lack of financial resources and deliver high-quality public services on a national scale.

The Case Study of Grassroots Public Service Media Outlet *Hromadske*

Hromadske telebachennia (literally – *public broadcasting*), known as *Hromadske*, was organized in 2013 by fifteen independent journalists as the first nation-wide public service media organization in Ukraine. It emerged from grassroots in order to fill the gap between the state-owned and commercial television. 'For us, Ukrainian public broadcasting is a social mission, a civic responsibility. Everyone can participate by providing financial, technical, organizational or volunteer support' – *Hromadske*'s Ukrainian Twitter account description says (Hromadske.ua, 2013a). *Hromadske* was registered as a non-commercial organization and was set up to provide Ukrainian citizens with media content to the letter of the professional journalistic standards and the code of ethics.[3] The initial funding was secured in approximately two equal parts by the means of crowdfunding and international grants (Hromadske.ua, 2013b).

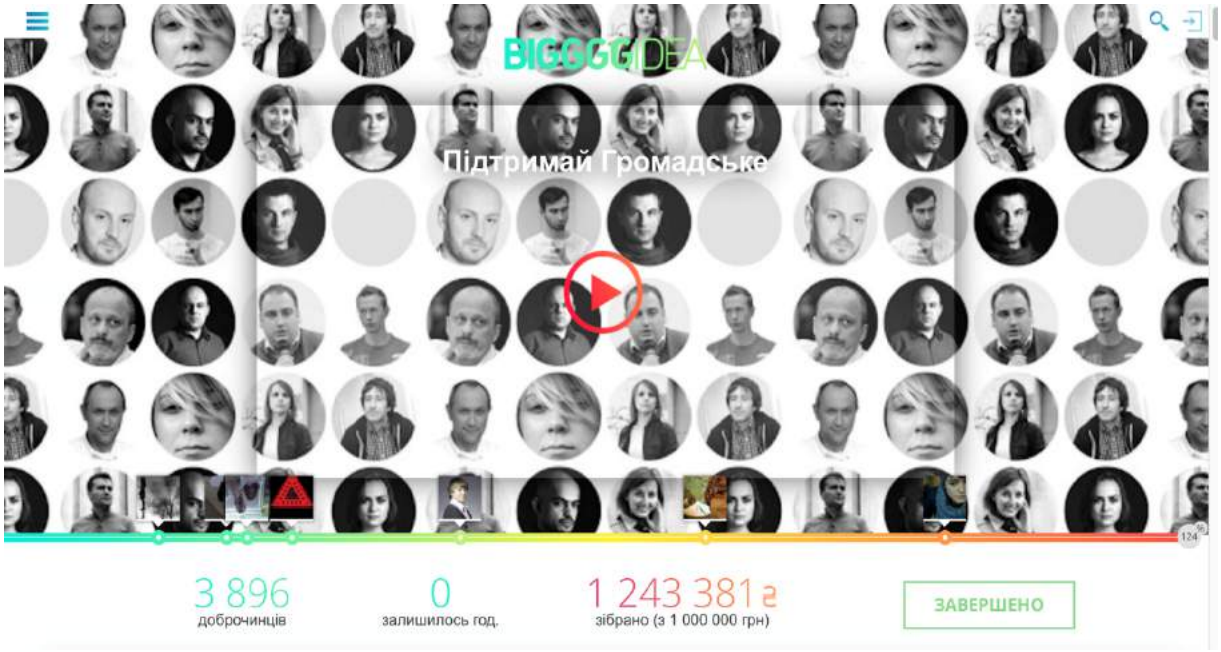


Figure 1. Self-presentation of Hromadske on the crowdfunding platform BIGGGGIDEA[4]

By the end of 2013, in six months after the beginning of what became the biggest crowdfunding campaign in Ukraine (*Suspilne Detektor Media*, 2014), *Hromadske*'s team secured 1,135,997 UAH (140,000 USD at the time). Such a significant public support came from an acute need for the non-commercial public service outlet, which would be independent

[3] Professional journalism standards include striving for an accuracy and objectivity in factual reporting and following a harm limitation principle. More on Code of Ethics and Journalistic Standards can be read on the websites of the Society of Professional Journalists and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation by the following links: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/professional-journalistic-standards-and-code-of-ethics/key-concepts/#bookmark2; https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp.

[4] Still from https://biggggidea.com/project/392/ [accessed 25 May 2016]

from the state, oligarchs and politicians and would work in the interest of society. The plethora of commercial TV channels did not lead to the establishment of the Fourth Estate in Ukraine, since the entire Ukrainian commercial media market was concentrated in the hands of few oligarchs, who were either directly connected to certain political parties or owned a business, which could benefit from the state support, prompting them to use media ownership as a means to ensure their business and political interests have media backing. Indeed, by 2013 Ukrainian oligarchs had been increasingly becoming monopolists in every field where they operated including media, economy, and politics (Kuzio 2016: 181). At the time, the political regime in Ukraine was based on the distribution of financial resources (through state dotation, taxation reliefs *etc*.) to interest groups in exchange for political loyalty (Lutsevych, 2013), prompting the oligarchs to limit the freedom of speech in the media outlets they owned. Another pole of Ukrainian media sphere was represented by the state television, which was in its turn censored by the state, according to the former journalist of the state broadcaster *Pershyi Natsionalnyi* Yuliia Bankova (*Suspilne Detektor Media*, 2013). As a result, Ukraine was on the 126th place out of 179 (bottom 30%) countries listed in the Worlds Freedom of Speech ranking by the Reporters Without Borders (2013).

Interestingly, despite establishing a great degree of control over traditional media, Ukrainian government remained ignorant of the potential of the internet. The internet media segment remained legislatively unregulated, which meant that websites could not be subjected to government pressures through licensing or tax police checks.[5] Thus, Ukrainian internet continued the tradition of Soviet 'self-published' clandestine oppositional press - 'samizdat' (Prytula 2006: 120, 108).[6] Since the emergence of the first online media outlet *Ukraiinska Pravda*[7] in 2000, the internet has been increasingly becoming a platform for the journalists to freely express their opinions and criticize the state.

When answering my question about the choice of the digital platform for the grassroots public service outlet, the co-founder of *Hromadske* Nataliia Humeniuk answered that the internet was cheap. Indeed, the internet allowed the team to significantly reduce the cost of TV content production and delivery (and made it possible in the first place): the costs of web

[5] In fact, the first time the state tried to adopt regulation to exercise pressure over online media outlets was on January 16th 2014, on the rise of the Maidan Revolution, when *Hromadske*'s rapid success made obvious the threat free internet presents to the semi-democratic regime. That day Ukrainian Parliament voted for the laws that allowed police to conduct the checks of the editorial offices of online media outlets and denied the citizens' right to the freedom of gatherings by prohibiting unauthorized gatherings of three and more. These laws were rendered unconstitutional after the Revolution, so the internet media outlets still enjoy the bigger degree of autonomy than traditional media in Ukraine.
[6] 'Samizdat' is known in Ukrainian sources as 'samvydav'.
[7] *Ukraiinska Pravda* was established by Ukrainian journalist Heorhii Honhadze, who was assassinated the same year, allegedly following the order of the president at the time Leonid Kuchma. As a proof of Kuchma's involvement, his bodyguard at a time and an officer of the State Security Administration of Ukraine Mykola Melnychenko provided the audio recording of Kuchma giving an order to assassinate the journalist. This resulted in a series of protests in 2000-2001 under the slogan 'Ukraine without Kuchma', which eventually led to the end of Kuchma's regime in 2004 and amelioration of the freedom of speech during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko in 2004-2008.

hosting cannot be compared to the costs of TV license and the image quality needed for the internet is much lower than the one necessary for television, which in its turn allows for substantial savings on professional equipment. Nataliia Humeniuk also mentioned that it was important to them that the internet was unpoliced. [8]

Yet, when the pre-planned start of broadcasting coincided with the Maidan Revolution, the internet has arguably played a much bigger role for *Hromadske* than was initially anticipated. Ubiquity of digital media allowed *Hromadske* to dedicate most of the broadcast time to the live streams from the places of revolution, filmed on mobile devices by both *Hromadske's* own and citizen journalists. Productive collaboration with citizen journalists and unique documentary content 'from the ground' allowed *Hromadske* to quickly gain the competitive advantage over the established traditional media outlets – in just eight days the live broadcast from *Hromadske* was simultaneously watched by over 100,000 viewers (Piddubna, 2015). In under a month the YouTube channel of *Hromadske* gained 126 million views, became a leading news channel in Ukraine and established a world's record for live streaming (*Telekrytyka*, 2015).

In the beginning, *Hromadske* was particularly attentively following social media conversations on Facebook and Twitter and integrated them into discussions with experts in the studio. Watching journalists scrolling social media feeds in the studio and commenting on it right away has arguably made *Hromadske*'s more relatable for the audience than traditional TV channels. *Hromadske* interviewed experts via Skype and invited viewers to make the Skype calls to ask a question or share their opinions on the matter. The lack of 'glossy' picture created an impression of a 'guerilla media', a grassroots television co-created by the professional journalists and the members of public, on an equal footing. The use of such an everyday conversational tool as Skype in television programme overturned the balance of power typical for the traditional television with its 'talking heads' and imagined 'passive recipients' and helped *Hromadske* to establish interactive two-sided communication with the active viewers (Figure 2).[9] In 2013 *Hromadske* worked in an improvised open-space studio and the viewer could often see the professional news presenter on the screen at the same time as the newsroom was working on the background and the guests for the next programme were entering the studio. In the next years, with the growth of popularity of *Hromadske*, it managed to secure

[8] At the Fourteenth Annual Stasiuk Lecture in Contemporary Ukrainian Studies, 'Media in a Time of Revolution and Information Warfare: Lessons from the Ukrainian-Russian Conflict' delivered by Nataliya Gumenyuk (Hromadske TV) on 26 February 2016 at the University of Cambridge.

[9] More on Hromadske's interactive practices can be read in my earlier article 'Where Broadcast and Digital Cultures Collide' available at: http://www.digitalicons.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/DI17_5_Terentieva.pdf (Accessed 25.08.2018)

more funding and subsequently open a new television studio in 2017, which helped them to 'look more like television' in their own terms (Hromadske.ua, 2017b, 0:30).

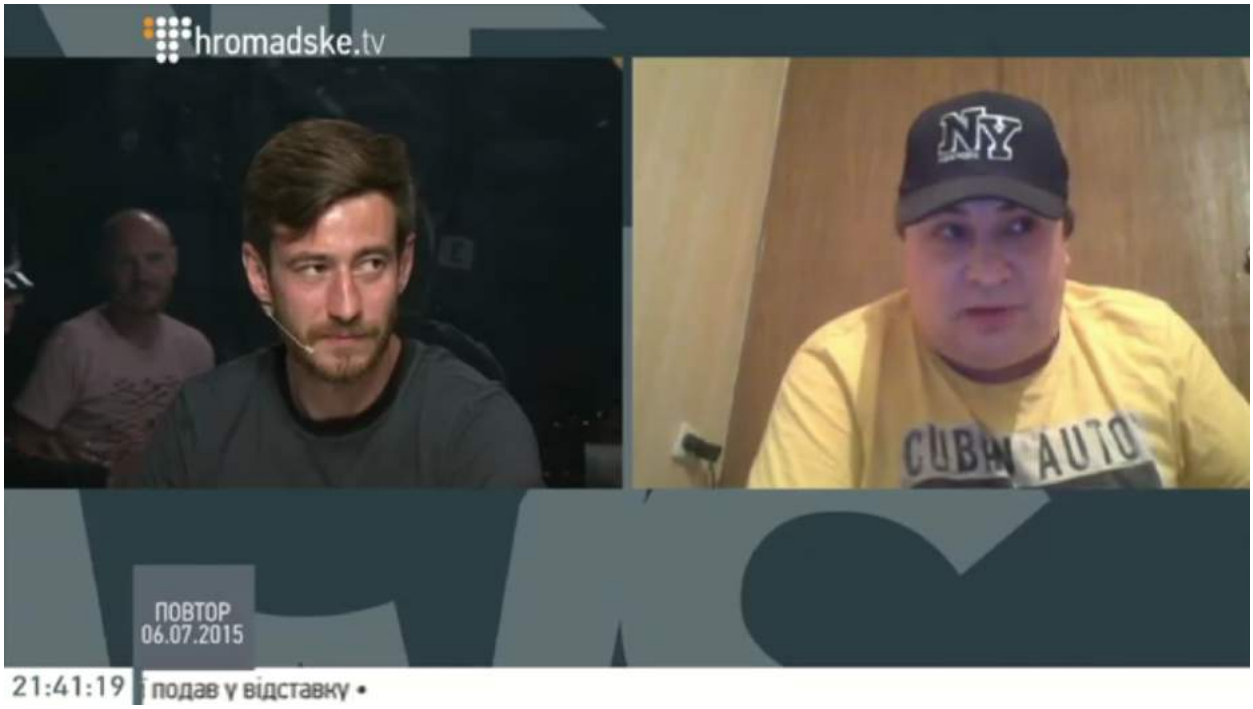


Figure 2. Still from 'Hromadske online' illustrating a viewer calling to the studio (06.07.2015).

According to the Head of *Hromadske* Nataliia Humeniuk, despite the significant public attention that *Hromadske* gained during the Maidan Revolution, the project fell victim to a popular association with it and had to work hard to prove itself as a high-quality multimedia outlet with public service values. Even though *Hromadske* does not have a written document which would formally set the public purposes of the media outlet, their work speaks for itself. The content-analysis of *Hromadske*'s programming reveals five major strands of content: informational, educational, cultural, entertaining and international – the types of content that to the large extent fulfill the public purposes set by the world's first Public Service Broadcasting organization – BBC.[10] It might be more than a coincidence if we consider the fact that in 2017-2018 *Hromadske* collaborated with mentors from BBC. On March, 1 2018 *Hromadske* also started the collaborative news project with BBC Ukraine, giving Ukrainian BBC Service a platform for live news broadcasting. 'The most important is that we show that Hromadske is the tool, which helps Ukrainian audience to get more quality news. In fact, there aren't many independent media outlets in Ukraine. We created this opportunity for other independent media outlets to use our platform', the Head of *Hromadske* Nataliia Humeniuk

[10] to provide impartial news, to support learning, to show creative content, to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the United Kingdom nations and to reflect the United Kingdom and its values to the world. The information on public functions of BBC is available here: https://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whoweare/publicpurposes.

said (Hromadske.ua, 2018). This is a vivid example of the co-production ethos illustrated by *Hromadske*'s willingness to give its platform to other public service media outlets in order to serve the public needs in the most efficient way.

As follows from the content-analysis of *Hromadske*'s programming, the first public function of *Hromadske* is to provide impartial information. In order to achieve impartiality, *Hromadske* started from ensuring transparency of their financing – something unheard of in Ukraine at the time. The law which would oblige all Ukrainian media to publish the names of their media owners was yet to be adopted after the Revolution in 2015, so in 2013 general public did not know who owned a certain media channel and therefore could not deduce what agenda the media outlet could have. In contrast, *Hromadske* has always been open about the ownership of the channel and has even been publishing their annual financial and auditor's reports since 2013 (Hromadske.ua, 2013b, 2014, 2015, 2016a, 2017a). Secondly, *Hromadske* took necessary steps to ensure transparency of their work and introduced the external Supervisory Board and the Editorial Board to ensure that the team adheres to the standards of journalism and professional ethics. The Supervisory Board is set to ensure that *Hromadske* fulfils its civic responsibility as an independent public service media.[11]

The Editorial Board in its turn controls the compliance with the journalism standards. For example, in 2016, the Editorial Board gathered to study the episode of *Hromadske*'s investigational programme *Slidstvo.info* from April 5, 2016, which was dedicated to the leaked Panama Papers revealing the offshores of the current Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. This episode called 'The Double Life of the President' was accused of factual inaccuracy by the representatives of Petro Poroshenko. This prompted the Editorial Board to intervene in order to double-check the facts and adequacy of their representation. The Board concluded that although the facts were well-substantiated, they were framed in a context of the war in Donbas, which was not necessarily relevant to the topic and added an unnecessary emotional component to the analytical content (Hromadske.ua, 2016b). As a result, the new episode was produced and aired on May 18, 2016. It was once again disputed by the lawyers of the President who claimed that journalists lacked the knowledge of foreign jurisdictions and made a mistake in translating one of the documents from Greek to Ukrainian, which led them to make false claims (*Obozrevatel*, 2016). In 2017, this controversial episode by *Hromadske* was awarded a Pulitzer

[11] In 2018, the Supervisory Board of *Hromadske* consists of eight external experts including British journalist Peter Pomerantsev, Chatham House research fellow and a manager of the Ukraine Forum Orysia Lutsevych, Ukrainian human rights activist and lawyer Yevheniia Zakrevska, the former Head of BBC Ukrainian Service Maciek Bernard-Recinsky and others.

Prize as a part of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists' 'Panama Papers' project (*Freepressunlimited*, 2017).

Another important feature of *Hromadske*'s news content is that it aims at representing the local news from particularly problematic regions of Ukraine such as the eastern Ukraine and Crimea, which were gravely affected by the Russian military presence. Thus, *Hromadske* has specially dedicated news services 'Hromadske.Skhid' and 'Hromadske.Crimea', which are particularly in need because traditional Ukrainian TV channels cannot broadcast on the territories controlled by Russia and Russia-backed separatists (Suprun, 2018), so the information available to the residents of these territories is limited to the one which aligns with the Kremlin's policy. Finally, this public service media outlet informs Ukrainians about important global developments in 'Hromadske.Svit' as well as works to inform the word about Ukrainian news and for this purpose has 'Hromadske International' division working in English. In addition to that, *Hromadske* offers the viewers commentaries to the most socially significant news in the programme 'Nyni Vzhe'. Such a clear division of the news and commentaries allows viewers to understand the broader context of a particular event remaining conscious that they are being presented the interpretations of facts, which should not be confused with bare facts.

Secondly, *Hromadske* aims at educating people. In 2017, *Hromadske* introduced the programmes 'Business-plan' and 'Pro$tonomika', which contribute to the development of the financial literacy and economic thinking. The educational needs of Ukrainian public are quite peculiar because of the post-Soviet transition to the free market economy. The programme 'Business-plan' explains how different businesses work while the programme 'Pro$tonomika' explains economic concepts in an accessible language. These programmes are particularly helpful for educating older generations, used to the state-controlled planned economy. *Hromadske* also provides cultural education by producing documentary films in 'Hromadske.doc' project, providing film reviews in programme 'Prokat' and giving a floor to rising Ukrainian music bands in the programme 'Stage 13'. *Hromadske* always seeks to implement the newest technologies and in 2017 created the first Ukrainian documentary film in the novel 360-degree format.

Another important public function – public oversight – is executed through journalistic investigations. In fact, there is a separate section on the website dedicated to the investigations. The investigative journalism programmes include a programme following Ukrainian reforms 'Re:forma', the programme investigating the possible instances of corruption 'Slidstvo.Info',

one of the episodes of which was created in terms of a joint project with the ICIJ was awarded with a Pulitzer Prize, as mentioned before.

Finally, *Hromadske* also entertains its viewers with a travel programme 'Chumatskyi Shliakh v Pivnichnu Ameryku'. However, the entertainment function of *Hromadske* is given much less attention than the others because of the plethora of high-quality entertainment content created by traditional Ukrainian TV-channels with significant financial resources, which in its turn are not necessarily interested to promote civic function of journalism.

Hromadske also explored various innovative ways to engage citizens in co-production of content. In 2013-2015, *Hromadske* also made an attempt to 'institutionalize' citizen journalism having launched the project 'Reporterska sotnia' (can be translated as the Reporters' Legion). *Hromadske* created a brief handbook for citizen journalists on how to create and upload their own videos covering the topics of public concern. These videos were broadcasted on *Hromadske* in January-April 2015 and stayed available on-demand on the website until 13 May 2016, when *Hromadske* moved to the new domain hromadske.ua. Unfortunately, the videos of 'Reporterska sotnia' as well as a solid part of the content are now lost with the closure of the initial website hromadske.tv following the conflict with one of the co-founders Roman Skrypin (Povzyk, 2016). In 2016-2017, with the beginning of the satellite and cable broadcasting, citizen journalism seems to have become less relevant for *Hromadske,* which has limited opportunities for co-production.

Another collaborative project - 'Hromadske Network' - was introduced in 2015 and was supposed to promote the local grassroots public service media outlets under *Hromadske*'s umbrella. Eight regional services were created from bottom-up and joined 'Hromadske Network' following the receipt of the European Commission grant of over 815,552 EUR for 2015-2016 (European Commission, c.a. 2015). Every week *Hromadske* made a digest of the most interesting content from regional services until the EU grant ended in 2016 and the local projects faced the need to secure sustainable funding themselves, which they failed to do.

Speaking about the goal of *Hromadske* at the Lviv Media Forum in 2016, its co-founder Nataliia Humeniuk said that the team's task is not simply to create public service broadcasting, but to create a cutting-edge multimedia product (Beliaieva, 2016). Indeed, *Hromadske* successfully delivers its content through the variety of platforms including the website, social media channels, mobile application, cable and even satellite broadcasting, the license for which was obtained in 2016, making *Hromadske* the first independent grassroots media outlet in Ukraine to broadcast on satellite. In 2017, *Hromadske* joined 80 cable television networks in order to serve 7000 households across the digital divide (Hromadske.ua, 2017b: 1:06, 1:11). In

addition to that, the digital reach of this grassroots public service media outlet is significant: in July 2018, *Hromadske* website was visited by 1,91 million people, 639,826 people follow *Hromadske* on Facebook and 958 thousand followers it on Twitter.[12] *Hromadske* is second most read Ukrainian media on Facebook (Beliaieva, 2016). For comparison, the website of Ukrainian state-funded public service broadcaster *UA:Pershyi* was visited by only around 156,980 people, which is twelve times less than the number of visitors of *Hromadske*. The popularity of *Hromadske* continues to grow with over 200,000 people having joined *Hromadke*'s social media pages in 2017 (Hromadske.ua, 2017b: 1:54).

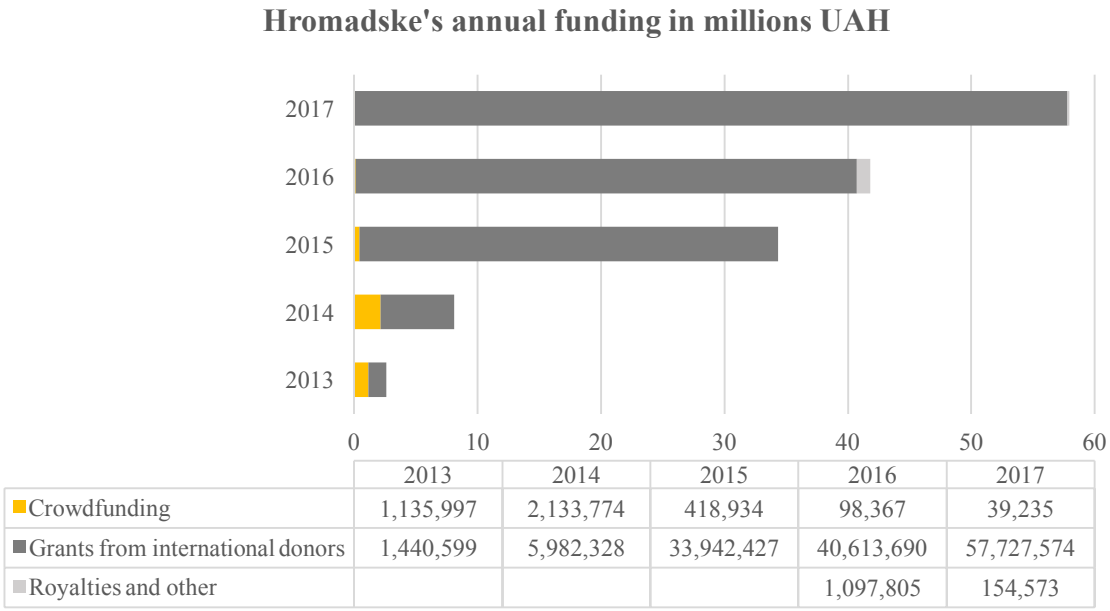
All things considered, the case study of *Hromadske* reveals both the opportunities and the limitations that are brought upon by reliance on the digital media for grassroots production of public service in media sphere. Digital media allow journalists to effectively self-organize and reach the public asking for a financial, organizational and volunteer support, which helps to build and upscale the sustainable public service media outlet quickly and efficiently. The ubiquity of digital cameras, mobile phones and social media allows to crowdsource the information from citizen journalists and by doing so reduce the costs of production, obtain the unique content from the ground and build the egalitarian relationship with the audience, which arguably contributes to the development of public trust to the media outlet. Another way to develop trustful relationship with the audience is transparency. By the virtue of making all the content as well as the information about the team and sources of funding to be simultaneously accessible on the website, *Hromadske* creates more opportunities for citizens to hold the media outlet accountable compared to the traditional television. Finally, by creating specially designated open-ended content for the project's social media pages, *Hromadske* invites commenting and sharing of their content, developing more horizontal relationship with their audience and encouraging participation in content's circulation and public discussion.

At the same time, with the rapid development of the project and its growing success, which allows it to secure substantial international grants, the character of public engagement is changing. Between 20013 and 2018, *Hromadske* moved from the actual co-production of television content (through crowd sourcing of audiovisual materials, sharing expertise with citizen journalists or collaborating with journalists from the regions in order to support bottom-up development of local public service media outlets) to the co-production of value with the citizens through their engagement with public service media content by commenting, sharing and giving a feedback in a way established public service media outlets tend to do. However,

[12] Data gathered by the author from Similarweb.com, Facebook.com and Twitter.com on August 23, 2018.

I would argue that the 'professionalisation' of the content's presentation – here I mean the glossy televisual picture good enough for satellite broadcasting and excessively high-quality for the digital media – causes the free-rider dilemma (Olson, 1965), when people do not support the cause when they think someone else can do this on their behalf.

If we trace the amount of funding secured from the public from 2013 to 2017 (Table 1, 2), we will see that the biggest amount of donations was received in 2014, the year when Ukraine 'was pushed to the brink of economic collapse' following the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war with Russia-stocked separatists in Donbas (The Economist, 2015).



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Crowdfunding	1,135,997	2,133,774	418,934	98,367	39,235
Grants from international donors	1,440,599	5,982,328	33,942,427	40,613,690	57,727,574
Royalties and other				1,097,805	154,573

Table 1. Hromadske's annual funding in millions UAH.

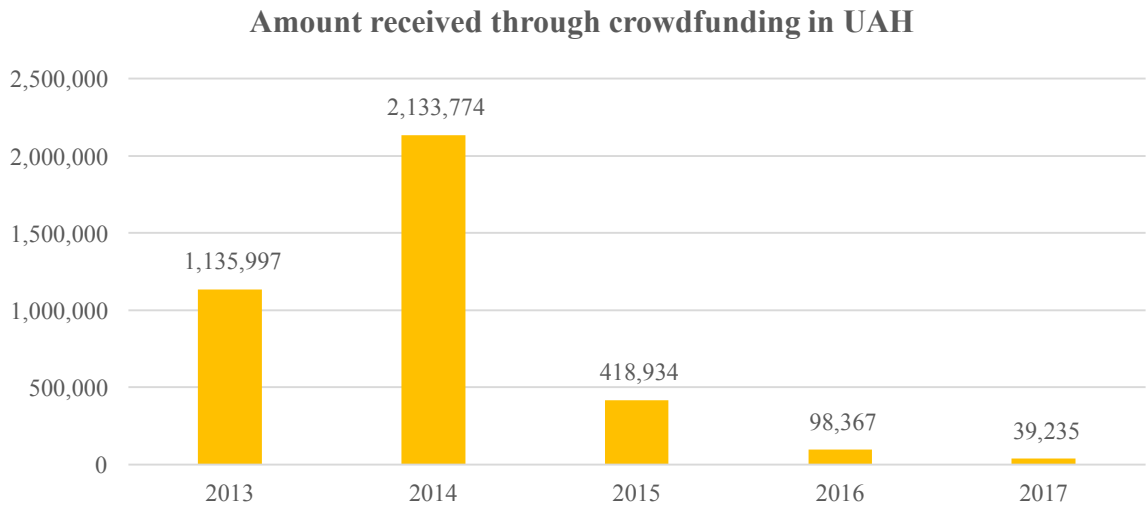


Table 2. Hromadske's yearly donation receipt from crowdfunding in 2013-2017.

Despite the dramatic lack of money, people actually donated more than ever contrary to the predictions of the resource mobilization theory. Yet, in 2016, when *Hromadske* grew big enough to acquire the license for the satellite broadcasting, the donations from the public shrank to 98,367 UAH. After *Hromadske* joined 80 cable networks and started satellite broadcasting in 2017 and opened a new studio making *Hromadske's* televisual content look – quality-wise – undistinguishable from well-funded private traditional TV channels, the private donations decreased to the minimum amount *Hromadske* has ever secured – 39235.16 UAH (Table 2). I assume that with the years and growing attention from Western donors, the motto '*Hromadske* only exists because of your support' started to sound less convincing to the public (Figure 3).

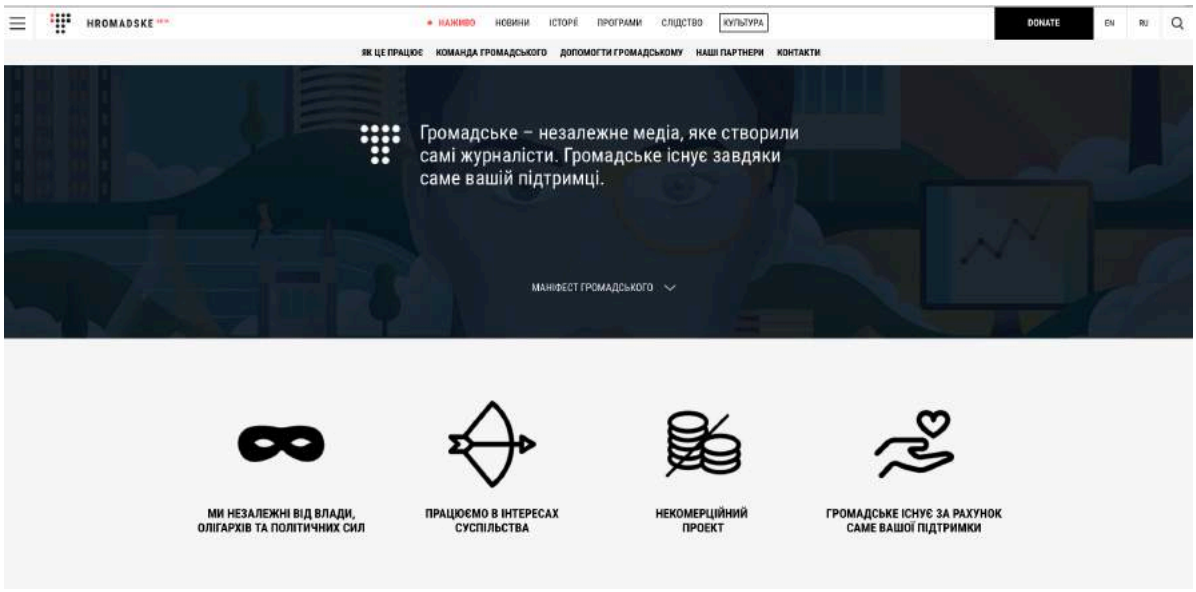


Figure 3. The 'manifesto' of Hromadske. Screengrab from www.hromadske.ua.

Nevertheless, the ability to secure funding within the third sector and provide public service to Ukrainians and those interested in Ukraine locally and internationally *for free* is an important achievement. One could argue that orientation on donors' support instead of crowdfunding puts *Hromadske* under a risk of becoming another Western-funded NGO, so many of which have proved themselves to have little constituency in society in the past.[13] However, I would argue that the case of *Hromadske* is different because it developed bottom-up and has arguably sustained grassroots ethos. It also proved its ability to secure funding from

[13] In 2013, Chatham House expert Orysia Lutsevych argued that substantial investments from international donors have contributed to a distortion of civil society in Ukraine (2013: 16) and a flourishing of a so-called 'NGO-cracy', in which professional leaders use access to domestic policy-makers and Western donors to influence public policies, all the while remaining disconnected from the public at large (Lutsevych 2013: 1). Such Western-funded NGOs preferred to develop recommendations and policies and discuss them during the roundtables with political elites instead of engaging with citizens. More on the so-called NGOcracy in Ukraine's civil society before the Maidan Revolution can be read in 'How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine' by Orysia Lutsevych. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/188407 (Accessed 26 August 2018).

the public and is likely to be able to secure it again shall donors' funding become unavailable. Finally, the reliance on external funding allows *Hromadske* to save the money of Ukrainians, who, with the thousands perished in Donbas war and almost two millions displaced, as a general rule cannot afford doing substantial savings or donating much. Those who can are now able to donate the spare money to other important grassroots *pro bono* projects, which were less successful in grant applications (as a free civic education platform the Open University of Maidan (*VUM),* for example*)*. So, by securing external funding *Hromadske* may indirectly support the development of other grassroots initiatives within Ukraine's 'digital' civil society.

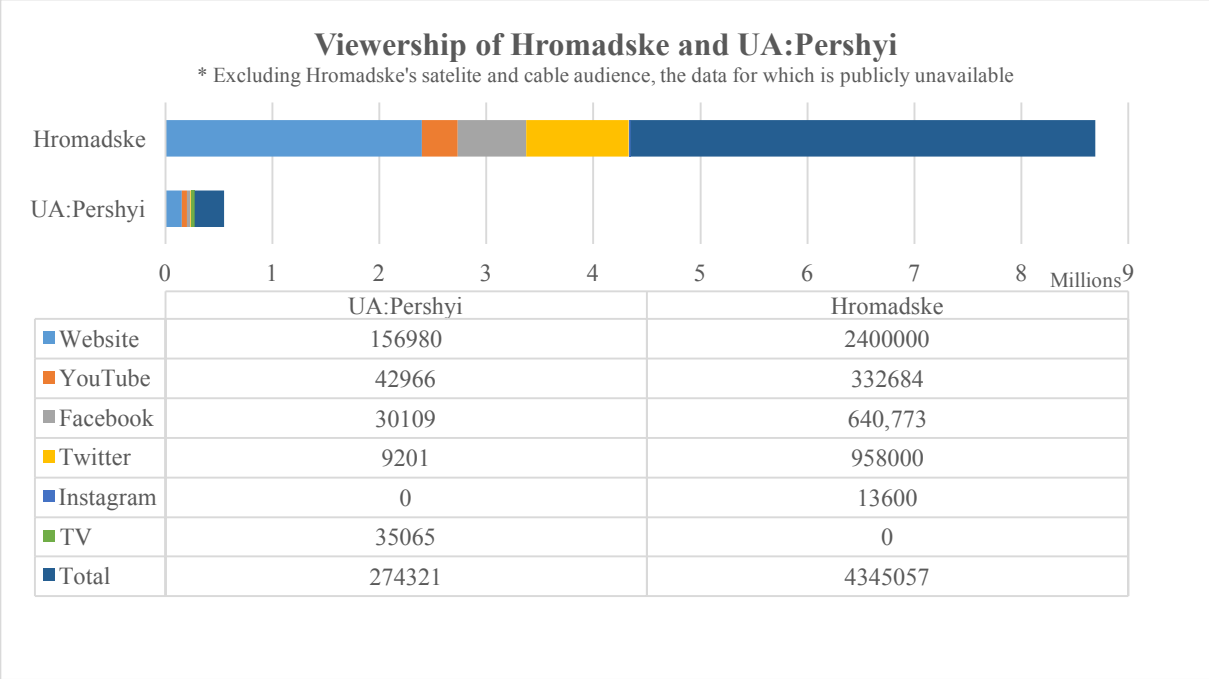
The availability of traditional governmentally-funded public service broadcaster *UA:Pershyi* and grassroots public service media *Hromadske* working in the same socio-economic and political conditions makes Ukraine a particularly valuable testing ground to observe the role played by the internet in 'disintermediation', promoting cost-efficiency and public engagement. First of all, reliance on digital media allowed *Hromadske* to start broadcasting in just four month after the beginning of the crowdfunding campaign in 2013, while public service broadcaster *UA:Pershyi* took over two years after the adoption of the law on Public Service Broadcasting to undergo the necessary bureaucratic procedures (*UA:Pershyi*, 2016). So, by the time Ukrainian state officially provided citizens with the public service broadcaster in October 2016, citizens had been already self-serving their public needs for three years. Secondly, despite being relatively well-funded from taxpayers' pockets[14] and having the television frequency with a potential reach of 97% Ukrainian households, *UA:Pershyi* actually provides public service to significantly smaller amount of people than *Hromadske* does through its digital channels only. In July 2018, *UA:Pershyi* had the television rating of 0.09%, which means that the actual number of its viewers together with the number of social media followers and website visitors totals to up to approximately 274,321 people.[15] For *Hromadske*, the respective number is at least sixteen times bigger totaling to 4,345,057 people. This excludes *Hromadske*'s televisual audience, the data for which is, unfortunately, unavailable for the lack of rating measurement of satellite in Ukraine.[16] Even though the numbers of viewers are

[14] in 2017, the funding of *UA:Pershyi* was 1,1 billion UAH[14] versus 54,4 million UAH[14] of *Hromadske*.

[15] The number of television viewers was counted based on the monthly rating of 0.09% measured by the Ukrainian Industrial Television Committee for age group 4+; the total number of Ukrainian citizens (42 279 600) provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Finance; percentage of people aged 4+ as provided by Ukrainian State Statistics Agency (95%, p.82) and the potential reach of UA:Pershyi – 97% of households. This brings the number of viewers to approximately 35065 people. I am also self-conscious that panel measurement has limitations since it generalizes the findings of viewership habits of the representative sample of viewers and not all the viewers in Ukraine, but I would argue that this measurement is helpful as a reference point. Interestingly, the YouTube channel of UA:Pershyi has 42,966 subscribers[15], which is bigger than the size of the channels' monthly audience. 9 201 people follow national public service broadcaster on Twitter and 30,109 – on Facebook. 156 980 of people visited the website in July 2018 bringing the approximate total number of viewers in July to 274,690.

[16] Unfortunately, there is no publicly available data about actual viewership, it is only known that with the beginning of cable and satellite broadcasting in 2017 *Hromadske* expanded its potential reach to 7,000,000 households. Because of the impossibility of obtaining the data, the televisual audience is not represented in the table, but it is likely that the actual audience of *Hromadske* is even bigger.

approximate, they were measured using the most recent data provided by Ukrainian state agencies and can give an impression about the size and structure of the audience of the bottom-up *Hromadske* versus top-to-bottom governmentally-funded *UA:Pershyi*. It is also an indication of the higher efficiency of *Hromadske* in delivering public services since it managed to serve at least sixteen times more people than *UA:Pershyi* by spending the half of budget of the latter (Table 3).



	UA:Pershyi	Hromadske
Website	156980	2400000
YouTube	42966	332684
Facebook	30109	640,773
Twitter	9201	958000
Instagram	0	13600
TV	35065	0
Total	274321	4345057

Table 3. Viewership of Hromadske and UA:Pershyi.

From May to July 2018, *UA:Pershyi* lost 0,01% of its audience because of the lack of the targeted financing for analogue broadcasting allocated by the government. This led to the debt of 75 million UAH from the side of *UA:Pershyi* and its subsequent disconnection from the analogue network. This situation illustrates the third benefit of the grassroots public service media with its flexibility in contrast to the official Ukrainian public service broadcaster, dependent on the government to provide the necessary targeted funding.

Therefore, the case study of *Hromadske* exemplifies the new opportunities for public service delivery provided by the internet: from crowdfunding and crowdsourcing to using digital media to establish trustful relationship and a two-way communication with its audience. *Hromadske* illustrates how in a matter of several years the online project started by fifteen journalists can grew big enough for global satellite broadcasting and outgrow the official public service broadcaster with a twice bigger funding, the development of which is being held by

multiple bureaucratic layers, which deprives the media outlet of flexibility, which necessary to effectively satisfy the ever-changing public needs. It also lacks entrepreneurial motivation because its funding is guaranteed by law and is not performance-based.

Yet, this case study also shows that reorientation towards the traditional television as a means of content distribution leads grassroots public service media to face the reluctance of the audience to engage with televisual public service content. The clear preference for the digital content is particularly surprising in Ukraine, a country with one of the lowest levels of internet penetration in Europe with only 65% of households are connected to the internet (Mediananny.com, 2018). This allows us to conclude that the example of Ukraine can inform policymakers and media practitioners in Europe[17] about the potential of the internet for the development of the independent public service media.

The case study of grassroots fact-checking project *StopFake*.

In February 2017 Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed the Doctrine of Information Security, which aimed to counteract Russian disinformation in Ukraine (*Prezydent Ukraiiny*, 2017). By March 2017, the full-fledged war with Russia-backed separatists has already taken over 9940 lives and left approximately 23,455 injured and around 1,650,000 internally displaced (Sydorzhevskyi, 2017; Hodovan, 2017). Unlike Russia, which appears to have been well-prepared to conduct a hybrid warfare with an extensive use of informational weapons including disinformation, Ukrainian state seemed completely taken by surprise both by the military aggression and by growing significance of media – and digital media in particular – in enabling it. The experts from NATO Strategic Communications of Excellence noted the important role of the 'weaponized information' in Crimea annexation: by gaining control over broadcast media and 'notoriously independent internet' in Crimea during the military operation there in March 2014, Russia determined Crimeans' perception of the events in the rest of Ukraine, which greatly facilitated the Russian seizure of the peninsula (Giles 2016: 12). Indeed, since 2013, Russian propaganda has been constructing the anti-Ukrainian narrative, where Ukrainian government was presented as a fascist junta and Ukrainians were called fascists with increasing frequency. In 2014, 43% of all mentions of fascists in informational programmes on Russia's state-funded TV channel Pervyi was referring to Ukrainians (Terentieva 2015). This arguably allowed to create popular association between Nazis and Ukrainians and present Russia's intervention in Ukraine as legitimate. Thus, the

[17] In 2017, only two EU countries, Bulgaria and Romania, had lower level of internet penetration than Ukraine (*Internet World Stats*, 2017).

example of Crimea suggests that information weapons should not be treated lightly and call for the new kind of public service: provision of information security as a necessary component of the national security. Yet, in the beginning of 2014 the Ukrainian response to Russian propaganda came not from the state, but from Ukraine's growing civil society itself.

On March 2, 2014, an aspiring journalist Olha Yurkova was sitting in the editorial office of one of Ukrainian media outlets and was transcribing an interview – a thing that often makes bored journalists and academics alike. So, her Facebook page was open and she was simultaneously chatting online with her peers from the Digital Future of Journalism School – a project by the Mohyla School of Journalism in Kyiv. That day these young digital-savvy professionals discussed the plethora of Russian propaganda and Ukraine's inability to effectively respond to it. Then Olha suggested that they created a website, which will be gathering Russian fake news, fact-checking them and publishing the refutations. Other students instantly volunteered to create a website, and this is how *StopFake* – which in the following four years will create 2987 materials in eleven languages and attract 14,000,000 web sessions – emerged (StopFake, n.d.).

According to one of the co-founders of *StopFake*, the Director of Kyiv Mohyla School of Journalism Yevhen Fedchenko, it was the state's inability to challenge the narratives of Russian propaganda prompted civil society to step in. 'Russian propaganda was very professional, it had a robust resource base…, it was noticeable that it was being produced and disseminated following a specific concept, while Ukraine had nothing like that. So, the society had to do what, in fact, the government should be doing', Yevhen Fedchenko (2014) noted, explaining the social role of *StopFake*.

In the beginning, it might have looked like these young journalists took upon themselves too heavy a burden to carry, yet luckily they were not on their own: volunteer movement was spreading its wings since the recent Maidan revolution in Ukraine (Onuch 2015, Sereda 2015, Wilson 2017). So, when the website, created on the free web engine, got more attention in the first few days that it could technically cope with, *StopFake* found volunteers among IT professionals to maintain it.[18] With the dramatic lack of financial resources, the project relied on the *pro bono* work of journalists; crowdsourcing (letters from the readers, regularly supplying the suspicious news pieces requiring verification, and often providing evidence that these were fake themselves); crowdfunding; and digital media as their primary

[18] In fact, during a nation-wide sociological study conducted by Sereda (2015), 94,2% of Ukrainians said it was important to them to support other people on voluntary basis. Volunteering was much higher on the list of priorities for people all over Ukraine than taking part in political decision-making.

resources. Two months after the emergence of *StopFake*, Yevhen Fedchenko described *StopFake* as a civic project without any organisational structure, fully created and supported by volunteers (Fedchenko 2014).

The extensive use of digital media compensated for the lack of financial resources and allowed *StopFake* to rapidly reach wide audiences: in the first two months of project's work alone, *StopFake*'s website attracted two million unique visitors (Yurkova, 2014). Digital media also provided access to free fact-checking tools such as Google maps, Google Earth, photo and video authenticity verification software, and allowed to create a virtual editorial office in messengers, enabling fact-checkers to coordinate their efforts and work for the project from different places, which was vitally important for this *pro bono* project since many of its journalists had to work full-time elsewhere at the time. **"**We use social media not only to disseminate our content but also as the base for our workflow… Our experience proves you can run a media organisation without big expenses. We have a website in 11 languages, TV and radio shows, a newspaper, [conduct] training, [organize] hundreds of conferences per year, and we manage to do all of it with a very modest budget. This is something we can really be proud of**"** – Yevhen Fedchenko said in an interview to *Hromadske Radio* (2017).

Quite importantly, digital media also allowed the project to debunk Russian propaganda beyond Ukraine. *StopFake*'s services attract particular attention from Russian residents, who represented 27% of *StopFake*'s visitors in July 2018 – the largest segment of *StopFake*'s audience. 18% visitors came from Ukraine, 9% from the United States, 5% from Germany and 4% from the UK (*Similarweb.com*, 2018). The international reach is particularly important because of the lack of objective information from Ukraine. Those international media outlets, that cannot afford regional correspondents in Ukraine, tend to rely on Russian sources of information because they are readily available for the international audience. For example, Russian governmentally-funded media outlet *RT*[19] had an annual funding of 18,7 billion RUR (approximately 218 million GBP) in 2017 allowing it to secure a large audience: 100 million people in 47 countries watch it every week (*RT*, n.d.).

One of the reasons of popularity of Russian RT lays in the fact that it produces 'spreadable' sensational stories under the guise of professional journalism. The coverage of MH-17 tragedy is a good example of this. Despite the fact that Ukraine has provided the proofs of the Russian origin of the missile from which the MH-17 was downed back in 2014 (which was subsequently confirmed by the international investigation in 2018 [Deutsch, 2018]),

[19] RT says it offers "an alternative perspective on major global events" with a "Russian viewpoint". The broadcaster was previously sanctioned by Ofcom for biased or misleading reports on the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria (Osborne, 2016).

Bulgarian media, for instance, had followed the Russian rather than the Ukrainian version of this tragic event at the time. 'It's not merely a case of sympathy or language,' believes Grozev. 'The Russian media just tell better stories, and that's what gets re-printed' (Grozev, 2014).

In order to counter-balance Russian propaganda in the Russia-controlled territories of Donbas and Crimea, *StopFake* is publishing a free newspaper *Your Right to Know* ('Tvoe parvo znat') debunking fake news. The 150,000 copies of the newspaper are being circulated on the borderlands of Ukraine's 'grey zone', getting to the non-controlled territories through postmen and personal networks (Romaniuk, 2018). Digital media is also a particularly convenient tool to reach the audiences in the so-called 'grey zone' controlled by Russia or Russia-backed separatists. In According to the data provided by *StopFake*'s editor-in-chief Viktoriia Romaniuk, in April 2018 Crimea residents represented 4% of *StopFake*'s audience and 2% of visitors came from Luhansk region and 5% from Donetsk totaling at 11% of the audience or 51000 visitors.

Recognizing the necessity of counteracting Russian propaganda and noting the efficiency of the digital public service organization *StopFake*, international donors readily support this initially crowdsourced and crowdfunded initiative. In 2015, *StopFake* started to obtain grants from the international donors, which diminished the role of crowdfunding for the project.[20]

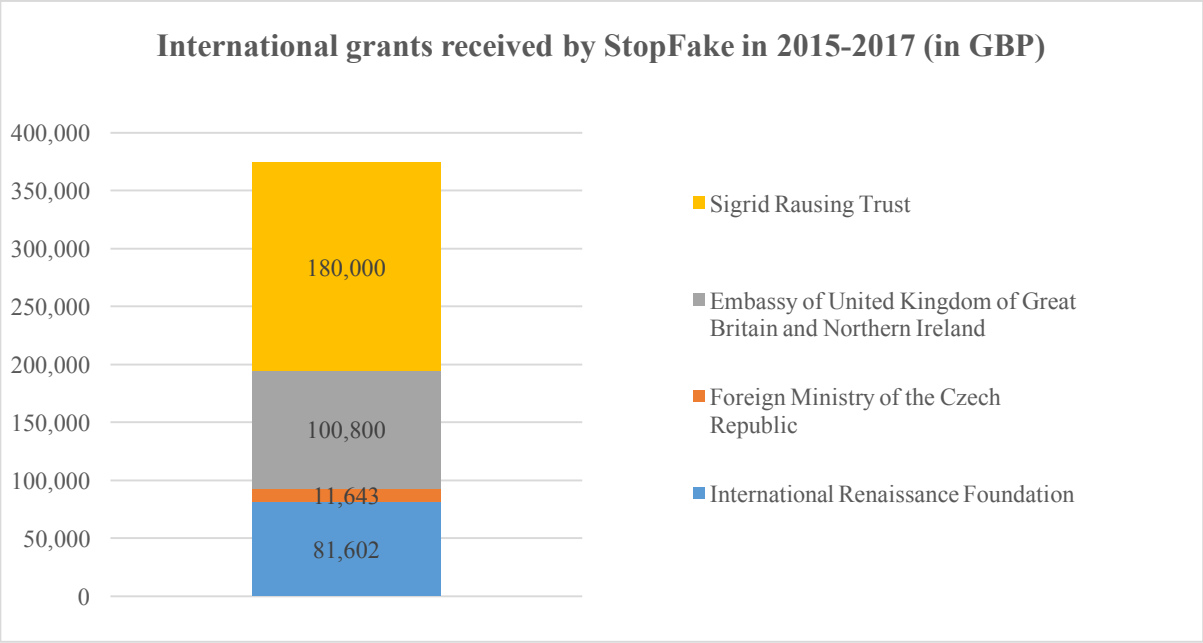


Table 4. International grants received by StopFake in 2015-2017.

[20] When asked whether crowdfunding still is an important means of funding for the project in 2018, the editor-in-chief of the Russian service of *StopFake* Viktoriia Romaniuk said that people do not donate much, but it would be fair to say that the project does not really promote crowdfunding (Romaniuk 2018).

The grassroots networked structure of the project was not suitable for many international donors, who have a requirement to only support registered non-governmental organisations. Therefore, *StopFake* receives funding through the Media Reforms Center – an NGO registered in 2005 by Kyiv Mohyla Academy management in order to organize and fund the Digital Future of Journalism School. As a result, in 2015-2017, *StopFake* managed to secure grants totaling to approximately 374,045 GBP (Table 3) of which 2,878,500 UAH came from the International Renaissance Foundation (*International Renaissance Foundation*, ca. 2015a, ca. 2015b); 13,000 EUR from the Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic (Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic, 2015); 100,800 GBP from the Embassy of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Ukraine (British Embassy Kyiv, 2015) and 180,000 GBP from the Sigrid Rausing Trust (Sigrid Rausing Trust, ca. 2016).

Yet, importantly, despite securing quite substantial international grants, hiring professional journalists and editors, *StopFake* still manages to retain the horizontal relationship with their audience, which allows it to continuously mobilize volunteers. On the website, the project credits the volunteers, who contribute to the work of the project by sending the messages that need to be fact checked or providing refutations themselves, as the co-authors of *StopFake*. Viktoriia Romaniuk, *StopFake*'s deputy editor-in-chief, said that the project receives five to seven letters a month from volunteers who monitor (pro-)Russian media sources and send suspicious media messaged for verification (Romaniuk, 2018).

Such state of affairs allows me to conceptualize *StopFake* not merely as an online media outlet, but as an example of a digital civil society organization, enabling 'connective action' in Bennet and Segerberg's terms. According to the scholars, the logic of connective action relies on people in the crowd, some with technology development skills, to create networks and platforms that take the place of more formal organizations and enable layered networks to organize activity (Bennet et al. 2013: 194-196). While Bennet and Segerberg explore how the digitally networked action works based on the example of digitally-organized protests like Occupy or Arab Spring, the case study of *StopFake* can complement their 'connective action' theory by extending its focus to the non-contentious civic actions that come after the protest comes to an end. More importantly, Ukraine provides us with an example of a digital civic initiative, which managed to achieve sustainability. In fact, Bennet and Segerberg note that connective action should not necessarily disperse in the end, even though it was the case for all the examples the scholars provided. So, the case study of Ukraine's *StopFake* offers critical empirical evidence in support of their argument.

The need for such a collaborative grassroots fact-checking media outlet is dictated by the inefficiency of the state in providing information on the occupied territories. It was not until December 2014, when the specially dedicated Ministry of Information Policy was created. It took the state another year to adopt a Law on Foreign Broadcasting System. The newly established foreign broadcasting service *UA:TV* was expected to become a means of countering Russian informational aggression (*CEDEM*, 2018). By the end of 2015, when the state bureaucracy was settled for the Ukrainian national foreign broadcasting service, the online-based volunteer project *StopFake* has already grown to a public service organization with international recognition and over 370,000 GBP of funding. *UA:TV* overlooked the importance of fact-checking and providing refutations of Russian propaganda focusing instead on promoting Ukrainian history, culture, art, creating touristic projects and telling the story of Ukraine's war with Russia in 2014. According to data from Similarweb.com, in July 2018, *UA:TV* website had fewer visitors then *StopFake* (338,060 vs 414,770 respectively), four times fewer YouTube followers (7,400 vs 28,189), smaller number of Facebook followers in total across official pages in all available languages (41,284 vs StopFake's 53,400), and a relatively small readership on Twitter: only 672 people red UA:TV vs 27,200 *StopFake*'s readers. A smaller audience of the state-funded foreign broadcasting service with over 200 employees and a budget of 100 million UAH (approximately 2,834,436 GBP) in 2016 might seem counter-intuitive.[21] For comparison, *StopFake* had only a seventh of this amount in funding in 2016 and its team consisted of 29 constant members and occasional pro bono journalists and volunteers from the public. Unfortunately, *UA:TV* does not publish data about its viewership and no rating measurement services conduct this kind of research for *UA:TV*. Similarly to the case of public service broadcaster *UA:Pershyi*, governmentally-funded *UA:TV* appears to lack motivation to engage with the audience since its funding is guaranteed by law and is not performance-based.[22]

All things considered, *StopFake* is employing the variety of methods to act upon Russian disinformation. These methods include regular media monitoring and fact checking, which results in the regular point to point refutations of Russian propaganda. These refutations are later being spread through both digital and traditional media channels, reaching audiences in Ukraine and abroad. Thus, the *StopFake*'s important public function to debunk pro-Kremlin disinformation as well as project's reliance on digital media to coordinate efforts of

[21] The data was provided by the general manager of UA:TV Liudmyla Berezovska in an interview to *Detektor Media* (Ostapa, 2017).
[22] The law on foreign broadcasting obliges the government to allocate 0,06% of a yearly budget to *UA:TV* (*CEDEM*, 2018) and 0,2% of Ukraine's yearly budget for the public service broadcaster *UA:Pershyi* (Law on Public Broadcasting, 2014).

professional journalists and members of public to raise awareness of the Russian disinformation allows us to conceptualize *StopFake* as an example of the sustainable 'connective action', which has managed to effectively overcome the risks associated with reliance on digital media. Digital-savvy journalists and editors constantly implement the cutting-edge technologies into the project. For example, in February 2018 StopFake introduced the plug-in for Facebook, which warns the users when a post comes from a source, which was previously known to spread the fake news (StopFake.org, 2018). *StopFake* also is a good example of how public service organisation can successfully find a balance between a 'networked' organisational structure and formal association with an NGO, which allows securing international grants while sustaining horizontal relations with its audience and volunteers. Indeed, while analysing the dangers of the 'menace of unreality' that Russian media spread globally, British journalist Peter Pomerantsev recognized the importance of civil society's efforts to counter-act Russian propaganda and suggested that, if 'if media organizations are unwilling to take this step, then other outlets, modeled on Ukraine's "Stop Fake" […] can be created' (Pomerantsev et al., 2014: 41). Thus, I argue that, with undemocratic regimes increasingly meddling in other countries' politics through the well-organized flow of fake news, the Ukrainian case becomes relevant for more countries around the globe. The approaches of *StopFake* arguably have significance not only for professionals and policy makers well beyond Ukraine, but particularly so for those citizens, whose governments are unable – or unwilling – to challenge the fake news, leaving people with no choice but to self-organize on a grassroots level for the sake of the 'informational self-defence'.

Conclusions.

The case studies of Ukrainian *Hromadske* and *StopFake* inform the strand of public policy literature on co-production, which has previously lacked the accounts of fully grassroots nation-wide digital public service organisations. In the case of Ukraine, digital civic initiatives emerged in 2013-2014 in order to fill in the gap in public service provision whenever the state failed to deliver. In a few years, these initially volunteer-fueled digital civic initiatives have outgrown the similar state-provided services by the number of users. The Ukrainian case illustrates the affordances of digital media for self-organisation of civic activists and building trustful horizontal relationship with public in the most cost-efficient way. It appears that the free internet allows for the disintermediation in public services and striping out the unnecessary bureaucratic layers, characteristic for the state public service provision system.

The case study of Ukraine shows that the lack of financial resources does not constitute the principal burden for civic participation as the resource mobilization theory within the strand of rational choice theories claimed (Olson, 1965). Both the cases of *Hromadske* and *StopFake* show that citizens were most active in donating to the causes they cared about in 2014, the year when Ukraine appeared to be on a brink of economic collapse (The Economist, 2015). So, what makes the Ukrainian case distinct? I would argue that it was primarily the public readiness to support the cause by the means of donations, volunteering and providing *pro bono* professional services that allowed grassroots digital initiatives to achieve sustainability and grow the necessary scale to attract attention from international donors in just a year.

As the previous studies by Musiyezdov (2014), Udovyk (2016, 2017) and Wilson (2017) showed, the Maidan revolution has arguably brought upon the surge of the sense of social responsibility among Ukrainians, creating a pregnant soil for grassroots crowdsourced and crowdfunded civic initiatives to emerge. What seemed to be a phenomenon in question for an academic community outside Ukraine, was expressed matter-of-factly by *StopFake*'s co-founder Yevhen Fedchenko: 'In Ukraine, we are currently witnessing a phenomenon when the society is actively supporting the initiatives which are important to it' (Fedchenko, 2014). This observation corresponds to the conclusions by Oksana Udovyck, who studied the role of grassroots initiatives in post-Maidan Ukraine. The scholar discovered that 'respondents were talking about the creation of a new civic culture and a new democracy. From a social perspective, such a culture would mean "detoxication from the passive hangover of the past," and a transition toward a responsible and active society.' (Udovyk 2017: 205)

This leads me to argue that availability of digital media, which facilitate self-coordination, public outreach and allow to grow social networks, coupled with the strong

ideational motivation for *pro bono* work allows to circumvent the lack of financial resources and produce sustainable high-quality public services to replace or complement less efficient – though much better funded – public services produced by the state institutions, often corroded by bureaucracy. The successful examples of Ukraine's grassroots digital public service organisations allows me to conceptualize the internet as 'public self-service media'. I argue that in the country with the perceived lack of access to the classical political opportunity structures (such as state institutions or well-established trusted NGOs), the internet provides the most pregnant soil for co-production in public services.

Therefore, it is recommended that governments enquired how the bureaucratic complexity of public service organisations can be reduced with the use of technology and how digital media can be used to facilitate co-production. It is also suggested to motivate state-funded public service organisations to engage citizens' in public service provision. The case study of Ukraine also reveals the need for the market-based incentives in the state sector in order to motivate state-funded public service organisations to provide quality public services. Finally, in a view of a growing significance of the sustainable networked forms of activism, the new international legislation can be adopted in order to allow digital public service organisations to receive grants on an equal footing with the traditional civil society organisations.

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