

## Mapping Digital Media Series: New media & news – Measuring the Impact



*After nearly 3 years of intensive research across 56 countries the Open Society Foundation has just released the cross cutting, global findings from its **Mapping Digital Media Project**. OSF's **Marius Dragomir** and **Mark Thompson** introduce our new series covering the report's findings.*

It gets harder every day to remember the analogue world: information poverty, public inertia, Olympian gatekeepers of one-way news output. The ICT revolution has forced radical change in every aspect of media and journalism. Platforms distributing journalistic content have proliferated, technological advances have driven media companies to revamp their operations in the sometimes desperate attempt to remain lucrative and relevant, while journalists operate in an ever faster-paced industry, and citizens have access to a cornucopia of sources of news and information.

More than half of the world's households have access to a television set receiving digital signal, almost three billion people use the internet, and mobile telephony coverage has exceeded 100 percent.

### Mapping the revolution

The revolution is real. Its glittering results, however, are sometimes fool's gold. Above all, is this ever-more-connected world a better place for independent journalism? This is one of the questions that the **Mapping Digital Media (MDM)** project sought to answer.

The MDM was launched by **Program on Independent Journalism (PIJ)**, formerly the Media Program, and the Information Program at the Open Society Foundations back in 2011 as a global research and advocacy effort to assess the global opportunities and risks for journalism and media created by the switch from analog to digital broadcasting, the emergence of new media platforms—particularly online—and the convergence of internet, broadcasting, and telecommunications.

We were not the first to examine this nexus, but we have encompassed more of its aspects than most research projects – perhaps more than any other. We believed that the only way to attempt an accurate survey of changes that are transforming the entire informational environment was to include journalism, technology, policy, law and economics. The result was an extremely ambitious methodology, covering a broad array of topics.

### Methodology of mapping

We then needed to implement the research in a sample of countries that would capture most of the leading states, the model transitions to digitization, and the most representative experiences of new media. No single list of countries could be definitive, but the 56 included in MDM includes 15 of the world's 20 most populous countries, covering more than 4.5 billion of the world's population, and 16 of the world's 20 largest economies. All the

BRICS countries are here, and all the MINT countries too. We regret omitting the Gulf Arab states and the relative paucity of coverage of Africa (partly to avoid overlap with [AfriMAP](#), another OSF project). Otherwise, it is not a bad sample – and, in its sheer size, at the very limits of feasibility.

Identifying risks and opportunities for independent journalism and media through a myriad of cross-cutting themes has been laborious and intensive work for our teams of national researchers. The use of a single methodological grid has had its weaknesses; it prevented researchers in some countries from doing full justice to local specificities and tendencies. On balance, however, this was a price worth paying to obtain broadly comparable findings from such varied environments.

### Overview of cross-cutting findings

The confirmation of this value lies in the overview papers, published this week, which summarize the key thematic and regional trends from. Some conclusions were predictable; others, less so:

- The internet is the main alternative platform for content that mainstream media outlets do not carry because of pressure from the state, advertisers, or political parties. It has enlarged debate on sensitive topics.
- Yet digitization has not significantly affected total news diversity. In no case has a new entrant become the leading television station by audience. No pure-player outlet in any country is the most popular outlet by audience.
- Digitization has brought no pressure to reform state broadcasters, or to radically improve the performance of public service media. But digitally-enabled competition has led viewers and listeners in some countries to trust public service and state broadcasters less.
- Where established public service broadcasters have developed a compelling offer on new platforms, they are among the very biggest providers of news. But the long-term efficiency benefits of digitization only become available after very significant new investments.

These are just a few points drawn from nearly 6,000 pages of analysis, condensed into 16 highly readable overviews. LSE's Damian Tambini calls MDM "the largest international study of media policy ever conducted." There has never been a project quite like it, and may not be again.

*This post gives the views of the authors and does not represent the position of the LSE Media Policy Project blog, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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The report features comparative findings from 50 country reports.  
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