

Social Media Development Tendencies in Georgia - Power of the Real Virtual?

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Social media constitute one of the most influential institutions in contemporary society, having a significant impact not only on other social institutions (political systems, economic systems, family, education, etc.), but also on the construction/reconstruction of social reality. Unlike classical media, the information in social media is “controlled” by the user, not the provider. Consequently, the traditional understanding of what a journalist is changes in social media—a journalist can be any person who disseminates information; subsequently, a so called citizen journalism develops. Information is relocated in this way, which is tantamount to the relocation of power.

Although social media have been developed in the West, they have quickly spread to the rest of the world, and currently there is discussion about the “explosion” of social media and social networks in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space. Certainly, Georgia is part of this global process; therefore, it is crucial to undertake a scientific study of the capacities, expectations, prospects, and the social and cultural risks that make up inseparable components of this transitional process. Intellectual, political and economic actors of Georgian society—civil society, science, the state and private sectors— must immediately make a shift toward understanding this new reality and take greater steps toward becoming an information society so that they are not left behind, and activities in virtual reality are no longer simply virtual but become real virtual.

Thus, our aim is to study social media development tendencies in Georgia. Relevant social science and judicial literature will be reviewed and analysed to make cross-cultural comparisons in the development of social media and trace their future prospects. Empirical research will also be conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods, namely, quantitative and qualitative content-analysis and discourse analysis of personal and corporate blogs and websites, in-depth interviews with active users and experts in social media, and a survey research based on structured interviews with populations living in the urban areas of Georgia with the largest number of internet users.

This research is important given that there has been little scientific study on the development tendencies of social media’s different aspects in Georgia, and no scientific study focusing on the transition from the virtual to the real virtual. The study of development tendencies and the impact of social media is strategically important, especially for small countries like Georgia, as social media provide the opportunity for personal and national self-actualization in a way that allows one to become global while simultaneously retaining local identity.