

## Information and news inequalities

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Early optimistic internet evangelists addressed news and information as an area in which digital technologies would eradicate social inequality; social networks, social media and other forms of grassroots or Indymedia would establish a powerful counter-public. From today's perspective, such digital over-optimism is no longer justified. Economic resources for news production are still unevenly distributed, and inherited patterns of unequal news coverage between central and peripheral nations still prevail. Digital technologies have rather added new layers to the existing news inequalities, in particular in the political economy of news. Digital and social forms of inequality appear to be deeply intertwined in the news realm.

The rise of the web has been celebrated repeatedly since the late 1990s as having eliminated some of the main filters that previously limited the production or distribution of news and, as such, been praised for having contributed to reducing some of the main forms of inequality existing in the field of news. Thanks to the new online platforms, as for example Jay Rosen (2006) explains, “the people formerly known as the audience” have gained “the means to speak to the world, as it were”. Through this process, he notes, “media power has been equalized” (Rosen, 2006). Thanks to these same digital tools, audiences are to be considered, according to Axel Bruns, not only as being “engaged *with* what they read, hear and see” but also as being able to “engage *in* the process [of news production and circulation] itself”. They now “have access to means of content creation and dissemination that no longer necessarily constitute a system secondary to the technologies available to mainstream media organizations” (Bruns, 2010: 133, emphasis in the original). In this chapter, we would like to run against the “strong current of digital optimism” that infuses this kind of theses (Turner, 2010: 127). Accordingly, we will first expose the underpinnings of the digital optimism argument, which tends to present the rise of digital technologies as a means of undermining the domination exerted, in the field of news production and distribution, by traditional news players and thus as a means of diversifying this field. Then, basing our developments on a synthesis of the existing literature, we will

show how the rise of online platforms has, in many respects, added a new layer to the pre-existing forms of news inequality.

### A new information economy that reduces news inequalities?

The development of the web has been described as having given shape to a new decentralized information economy, breaking with the preceding, much more centralized, information economy. Yochai Benkler's (2006) *The wealth of networks* is illustrative of this belief. It indeed describes the mainstream media and the web as being governed by two radically opposed structuring principles. In the old "mass-mediated environment", the information production and distribution costs were extremely high. "It is very costly to tell stories in the mass-mediated environment" (Benkler, 2006: 165). Consequently, in this "industrial economy of information", the number of players that are able to produce and circulate news is restricted and particularly unevenly distributed. However, the expansion of the web has been described as having transformed this industrial economy of information. The web has indeed provided the infrastructure for the development of a new "networked information environment", which, in many respects, thanks to its ubiquity and low costs for the ordinary user, has eliminated some of the main filters that used to impede the production and distribution of news. "The networked information economy is departing from the industrial information economy": it has allowed "a radical increase in the number of storytellers and the qualitative diversity of the stories told" (ibid.: 166).

In his book, *Cultural chaos: Journalism, news and power in a globalised world*, Brian McNair (2006) makes a similar argument. He describes the radical changes that the advent of the web produced for the information environment through a series of binary oppositions characterizing the periods before and after the rise of the web: hierarchy versus network; information scarcity versus information surplus; exclusivity versus accessibility; and homogeneity versus heterogeneity (diversity). According to this view, we have moved from a highly hierarchized information environment to a networked information environment; from a situation characterized by the scarcity of available information to its overabundance; and from a reality in which the production and distribution of news were the privilege of a limited number of "mainstream and established outlets" to the existence of "hundreds of millions of online [news] producers". "The significant augmentation of the degree of diversity of viewpoint" is thus in this context one of the main characteristics of this new online information environment (McNair, 2006: 199-202).

Interestingly, this statement on the radical changes to the information environment brought about by the advent of digital technologies is coupled with a call to change the theoretical apparatus used for trying to understand the issues at stake. McNair criticizes in particular the political economy perspective, which has, for decades, decrypted the different filters that have limited the production and distribu-

tion of news. Born in an information environment structured by highly hierarchical relations and by the scarcity of news, this theoretical perspective is presented as being ill suited to understanding the logics of a networked information environment, in which a great number of players can contribute to the production and circulation of news. “The political economy model fails to account for the complex dynamics of the twenty-first-century media system, or the unruliness of its journalistic outputs” (ibid.: viii–ix). The general picture that is given of the new digital news environment is thus one in which, thanks to the new technological opportunities granted to a multitude of new voices eager to express themselves, the power exerted by the dominant media news industries would have been, in many ways, “equalized”, to use Jay Rosen’s word.

In this chapter, we will discuss this argument, trying to show that, beyond the seeming “unruliness of [the] journalistic outputs” of the twenty-first-century news system, some of the old rules that used to govern the production and distribution of news still prevail and oppose the idea of a reduction of inequalities in this field. Moreover, the rise of online platforms has, in many respects, added new dimensions to the existing forms of inequality in news production, distribution and reception, either on the national or on the international scale.

### Towards a new international digital information order?

The inequality in the production and distribution of news on the international scale has long been documented. Research on the political economy of news played an instrumental role in highlighting this inequality. Such studies were developed in the 1970s, in a context in which the inequalities structuring the international circulation of news were denounced in diplomatic arenas, in particular at UNESCO, leading to calls for the implementation of a *new international information order* (NIIO). Within this context, the political economy approach underlined the need to scrutinize the material conditions organizing the production and distribution of international news. Accordingly, the works carried out from that perspective have underscored the imbalances structuring the circulation of international news, reflected in the underrepresentation of the countries of the South in the international news provision as well in their negative representation of these countries, tending to be covered only in times of crisis (Masmoudi, 1978).

Trying to understand the causes of such imbalances, the political economy of news literature brought to light the central role of the main players in the international news trade – international news agencies and national media – in this respect. This literature described the main Western international agencies (Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters and Agence France Presse) as well as the main national media as key “gatekeepers” in the international circulation of news (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985). These agencies and media outlets

were identified as constituting key filters through which an event occurring in the world has to pass to become (or not become) a piece of news in the media of the North or of the South.

The rise of the web has, in contrast, been seen as a means of circumventing the domination exerted by these outlets in the international news circulation and reducing the imbalances that characterize it. The “online environment”, according to this perspective, offers a new “deterritorialized” space “that overrides geography and increases opportunities for non-mainstream, citizen-based news sources” (Reese et al., 2007: 254). In other words, the expansion of the web would have transformed the previous structures of international news production and distribution. In this new environment, the news agencies and other “old’ media” institutions have lost “the centrality” that they previously had “as international communications institutions” (Berger, 2009: 355-359).

These arguments need to be relativized. First, it is necessary to recall that the “traditional news organizations and broadcast companies are [still] prominent on the web” (Hindman, 2009: 13). In many respects, then, “old media’ gatekeepers” remain in place in the new online news landscape. As traditional news organizations are still important players in this field, it is not surprising to see some of the characteristic patterns of offline international news production and circulation reproduced online.

This applies in particular to the high level of dependency of the main online media in the field of foreign news on the dispatches of the main Western press agencies. In 2007, Chris Paterson showed that the websites of CNN, ABC and MSNBC, some of the “leading websites providing international news in the US”, to a large extent reproduced the contents of the dispatches of the two main press agencies of the Anglophone world, Reuters and Associated Press (Paterson, 2007: 60-63).

Moreover, as some other studies illustrate, the representation of the world that is given by the main news websites seems to be fraught with the same imbalances already described as characterizing offline media. In research explicitly echoing the works carried out in the late 1970s in the context of the calls for a new international information order, Itei Himelboim and colleagues (2010) carried out a quantitative content analysis of 223 websites of newspapers and public or private televisions in 73 countries. They conclude the existence of “a highly hierarchical structure of news flow”. Only a “very few countries” – mainly countries of the “centre” or countries of the “periphery” in crisis – were covered, while others remained largely invisible. “The evidence suggests that the news media’s use of the web sites does not take advantage of the digital technology to break traditional structural constraints and serve their audiences better in international communication” (Himelboim et al., 2010: 307-308). In this sense, as Lee Artz (2017: 59) contends, the rise of digital technologies has resulted in “more news clutter, more news stimulation, and more transnationally hegemonic news frames”.

## The rise of new dominant information agents

The imbalances in the international circulation of online news documented above are not new. In many respects, they replicate well-known older inequalities. However, the rise of the web has also engendered new forms of inequality in the field of international news. The expansion of the web has indeed been accompanied by the development of a new generation of infomediaries – search engines, news aggregators and social digital networks – which have become new “domination information agents”, to coin an expression used to describe Google’s operations (Segev, 2010: xviii). These infomediaries, by the way in which they redistribute contents made by others, “produce information inequalities by promoting certain actors [...], while marginalizing others” (ibid.: XVIII).

The first element that has to be underlined is the fact that, with the rise of Google, Yahoo!, Google News, Yahoo! News, Facebook, Twitter and others, a new generation of US-based global companies, influencing the way in which people access the news around the world, has appeared, with no competitor of comparable scale. Google has more than 70 offices in more than 40 countries, and Google News is available in 35 languages and Facebook in 75.

Interestingly, although news aggregators, such as Google News, are new actors in the business of distributing news on an international scale, they too reproduce the old inequalities structuring this field. Based on a quantitative analysis of more than 65,000 articles, comparing the coverage of foreign news by Yahoo! News and Google News in the US and in India, Kohei Watanabe (2013) highlights the same kind of imbalances as those mentioned before. He notes a striking convergence in the way in which both news aggregators, in both countries, portray the world. They both offer a “skewed representation of developing countries”, under-representing them while at the same time over-representing developed ones (Watanabe, 2013: 152). Kohei Watanabe attributes the persistence of these old patterns of inequality in the representation of the world in the age of the news aggregators to the continuous predominant role of main Western press agencies as sources of foreign stories redistributed either by Yahoo! News or by Google News, in the form either of dispatches or of articles. In the online world, “the international news agenda-setting function is still [in the last instance] in the hands of Western news organizations” (ibid.: 153).

Along with search engines and news aggregators, social networks, such as Facebook, also play an increasingly important, yet relatively understudied, role in the circulation of international news. Some research nonetheless suggests that the use of Facebook as a means for circulating information will probably not result in a transformation of the skewed representation that is given of the world in the online news. Following an already well-established path, Facebook users tend to privilege breaking stories on the latest crises. As documented by Nic Newman (2011: 24) in his study of Facebook users of BBC News top stories, “Facebook users tend to be interested in major news stories or events that are funny or unusual”. In other words, the news preferences

of Facebook users also constitute a prism or filter, quite similar to the one that the mainstream media have used for decades to cover the world.

## The limits of the counter-information functions of user-generated content

Until now, we have concentrated our argument on the dominant online news players (major international news agencies, news websites or aggregators), but we have not considered the multitude of smaller news websites or blogs established by journalists or amateurs eager to provide other perspectives on the world. However, these are constitutive elements of the variety of news initiatives flourishing on the web. Some of these have aimed at reducing the unequal relations structuring the representation of the world in mainstream news media. This is particularly the case of Indymedia, which, at a very early stage, was described as constituting “an important departure from traditional models of news gathering and distribution as practiced by global news agencies such as Reuters and AP” and, as such, representing “a direct and viable challenge to the mainstream media’s portrayal of important international events” (Chadwick, 2006: 302-303).

Indymedia was established in Seattle in 1999 within the context of the alter-globalization protests against the World Trade Organization. In its first years of existence, it was able to produce valuable “counter-information to the media giants”, which circulated on a transnational scale through its network of 150 independent media centres (Kidd, 2003: 64).

Quite rapidly, though, questions were raised about the ability of the news provided by Indymedia to attain a large public and effectively fulfil its “counter-information” functions. In their study of both the “traditional” and the “alternative” news content in the United Kingdom between 2007 and 2008, Joanna Redden and Tamara Witschge (2010: 179) stress the importance of Indymedia.org.uk, stating that it undoubtedly provides “different perspectives from those represented in mainstream news coverage”. However, they also underline that “it has still proven difficult for such content to reach a wide audience”, which counters, they note, the “early hopes of smaller news providers being on equal footing with transnational conglomerates” (ibid.: 181).

Moreover, while being an alternative actor, the transnational network of Indymedia’s independent media centres is structured by the same imbalances that characterize the mainstream news coverage of the world. At the end of 2003, there were more local websites of Indymedia in France (Redden & Tamara, 2010: 4) than on the whole African continent, and nearly 40 per cent of the 122 local websites were concentrated in the United States (ibid.: 47) (Mamadouh, 2004: 491-492). Having played a pioneering role, Indymedia started to decline from the mid-2000s – a decline that coincided with the expansion of the number of blogs in Western countries (Lievrouw, 2011: 143).

The rise of the blogosphere and the role that it plays in the “coverage of international events” have been considered as one of the main fields in which “do-it-yourself

news production and distribution using the internet has undoubtedly altered the established game” of mainstream media (Chadwick, 2006: 303). Due to the relative lack of empirical research, it is not an easy task to measure the role of blogs in the international circulation of international news. Ethan Zuckerman was one of the first to study this issue, in a paper that he wrote in 2005 on the contribution of the blogosphere to international reporting. One of his starting points is a critique of the lack of attention that the mainstream US media pay to international news and especially to news on developing nations. Zuckerman even goes as far as to endorse some of the calls for “media reform” outlined during the debates for a new international information order. He then examines the US blogosphere to determine whether it fills this gap, thanks to a quantitative study carried out on Blogpulse. His analysis is revealing: “Bloggers, as a whole, appear to ignore developing nations more to a greater degree than mainstream news coverage”. Furthermore, they tend to cover stories on the developing world above all when these are “primed by mainstream media” (Zuckerman, 2005: 25).

While studying this issue, Zuckerman initiated a project to struggle against these observed tendencies in the blogosphere. In December 2004, he created a content aggregator with Rebecca MacKinnon (based at the Berkman Center of Harvard University, *Global Voices*) with the objective to “make room for the so-called ‘third world’” (Zuckerman, 2013: 123). This aggregator curates, verifies and translates contents published online in blogs, in independent press and on social media platforms all over the world. As Zuckerman explained, they sought to “correct shortcomings in the professional media’s coverage of the developing world”. By “providing coverage of events that other media outlets missed”, they were expecting to “influence agenda setting” and thus to contribute to reducing the “imbalances in attention” paid to the countries of the South (ibid.: 127).

Nevertheless, *Global Voices* has not been so successful in fulfilling the objective of influencing the agenda of the mainstream media. Indeed, in consonance with the well-known shortcomings of the mainstream media’s coverage of the world, driven by breaking stories, Zuckerman acknowledges that the aggregator is used by journalists as a source of information on a given country when it experiences “sudden turmoil” or when it “suddenly bursts into the headlines”. It is not used to “find important unreported stories before they break” (ibid.: 128). This points to the persistence of the quantitative and qualitative imbalances in the global news coverage online and the difficulties of struggling against this state of affairs.

Finally, the best way to illustrate the permanence of this inequality in the media coverage of the world in digital times is perhaps to make a reference to the work that Mark Graham devoted to Wikipedia. While not, strictly speaking, being a news website, Wikipedia is, “arguably, the largest, most used, and most influential single web platform on which people are creating layers of information about our planet”. As such, to study it is illuminating for understanding the “geographies of online information” as produced through collaborative websites (Graham, 2014: 104, 110).

Studying Wikipedia, Graham offers a picture that contrasts sharply with those that present the internet “as a ‘great equalizer’”. Indeed, the author shows that the geography of information produced by the contributors to Wikipedia is “highly uneven”. Contributors, concentrated in North America and in Europe, tend to produce content on those two continents while largely ignoring the rest of the world. The US, Canada and most European countries “are characterized by highly dense virtual representations, while others are barely represented at all”. Graham concludes: “Not only is there not a lot of content created *from* the Global South, but there also isn’t a lot of content created *about* the South. A lot of people and places are both literally and figuratively left off the map” (ibid.: 110-114, emphasis in the original).

Having discussed the persistence of imbalances in the production and circulation of international news in the digital era using a macro perspective, we now study the issue of news inequality in Europe more precisely.

## Continued inequalities in news production and distribution

In addition to aspects of production and circulation, inequality in news might refer to differences in (a) ownership of news outlets and (b) access to and use of news channels. Although traditional news outputs, like newspapers, have lost their appeal to audiences, traditional news organizations have not yet lost their importance in the media landscape. In effect, leading news organizations have colonized the digitalized news universe. To pre-empt the competition, they have set up “peripheral” news websites. With the resources obtained from their previous lucrative news media activities, leading news organizations have retained their dominance as news providers, exploiting the newsgathering resources and establishing the reputations of their powerful parent companies. According to James Curran:

(...) the dominant news organisations have entrenched their ascendancy because they have gained a commanding position in both the offline and online production and consumption of news. In addition, the rise of the internet as an advertising medium has led to budget cuts, increased time pressure on journalists and, sometimes, declining quality in mainstream journalism. This has not been offset by new independent news start-ups because these have been mostly too small and with too little firepower to ride to the rescue. (Curran, 2012: 21)

It seems that

gates and gatekeepers remain a critical part of the information landscape, even in the Internet age. Some ways in which online information is filtered are familiar, as traditional news organizations and broadcast companies are prominent on the Web. Other aspects of online filtering are novel. Search engines and portal Web sites are an important force, yet a key part of their role is to aggregate thousands of individual gatekeeping decisions made by others. (Hindman, 2009: 13)



As Curran (2012: 19) points out, “the rise of the internet has not undermined leading news organizations. On the contrary, it has enabled them to extend their hegemony across technologies”. If one looks at the news items and sources that the new content aggregators use, one sees that they do not usually give prominence to alternative news sources.

Nor has the internet connected the legion of bloggers to a mass audience. On the contrary, these new developments have led to inequality in the job conditions in both sectors: there is an increased precariousness of employment in online ventures compared with that (already substantial) existing in traditional news organizations. As Curran notes (2012: 20-21), news budgets have been cut “in the major mainstream media and fewer journalists are being expected to produce more content, as a consequence of newsroom redundancies, the integration of online and offline news production, and the need to update stories in a 24-hour news cycle”. This also translates into unequal output quality in the production of these news organizations.

On the other hand, the delivery of news has changed. This has given an advantage to new infomediaries, which do not produce contents but exploit the contents produced by others, mainly the major news organizations. As such, they can reinforce traditional inequalities by not giving much room to alternative media sources. By using algorithms to select information, news aggregators such as Google News prioritize some news providers over others, tending in many respects to reinforce some well-established hierarchies. In their study of the processes of infomediation by Google News, Nikos Smyrnaiois and Franck Rebillard (2009: 105) found that the latter tended to privilege “mainstream news websites offering ‘dominant’ news, possessing a large editorial staff, with a high level of daily news output”. Actually, the rise of these new infomediaries has created new inequalities in the political economy of news: the financial power of the major infomediaries far exceeds that of the main news organizations (Birkinbine et al., 2016).

In the past, there was a physical concentration of production and distribution facilities that were not easily accessible to most members of the audience. Nowadays, the members of audiences can also report news events, mainly through social media. In earlier days, the use of technologies mainly allowed one-directional contact. Hence, there was little feedback from the audiences to the media. For some, the separation of media from the audience was an inherent limitation that gave mass communication an inevitably undesirable character. In the analogue era, mainstream news media used to invite and present the views of the establishment, men and the affluent. As Herbert Gans (1979) put it long ago, citizens were simply not as equal as government representatives, and women were almost never as equal as men. Referring to class, Ehrenreich (2007) noted that the American working class has disappeared from the media. In the news, “working class people are likely to cross the screen only as witnesses to crimes or sports events, never as commentators or – even when their own lives are under discussion – as ‘experts’” (quoted in Clarke, 2016: 80). Moreover, journalists’ educational and socioeconomic backgrounds used to be different from,

actually higher than, the majority of their audiences. Gans (1979: 61) pointed out that “the news especially values the order of the upper-class and middle-class sectors of society”. According to Debra M. Clarke (2016), because journalists are positioned within these sectors themselves and many have never experienced life outside these classes, it is the wealthy and middle classes that are best represented in news.

The rise of digital technologies has not fulfilled all the hopes vested in their ability to abolish these structural imbalances. This rise has undoubtedly given the opportunity to new voices to express themselves. However, given the educational and socioeconomic background of those empowered to do so – often quite similar to those of the journalists working for the traditional media – this has not fundamentally challenged the unequal structures characterizing the sociology of news producers (Hindman, 2009; Rebillard, 2007).

Moreover, with the benefit of hindsight, recent studies on online news production by amateurs show that there is a disjuncture between the optimistic views held on the so-called Web 2.0, on the one hand, and the reality of the online participation of ordinary citizens, on the other. With the advent of digital social networks, such as Facebook, online participation increasingly tends to contribute to the distribution of online news through recommendations rather than through the actual production of online news (Guibert et al., 2016).

## Inequalities in news consumption

We live in a media era in which people are able to choose among numerous media outlets within their homes: in most cases, in front of their TV or PC monitors or on their smartphones. In effect, the growth of new media and their relevant delivery systems enables changes in the patterns of consumption. It seems that people’s experience of news is being reshaped by technological changes, of course assuming that people pay attention to the news at all.

As in the case of other media content, news consumption relies on multiple new media outlets. A recent study by the Reuters Institute reveals that most people go directly to the websites of broadcasters or newspapers to access news. Nonetheless, people increasingly find news via the various search and social media services offered by digital companies like Google and Facebook. These social media have become integral to the way in which people find and access news all over the world, and mobile news notifications have become “an important new route to content and giving a new lease of life to news apps” (Newman et al., 2017: 9).

Changes in news consumption have far-reaching implications (Maier, 2010). The new media environment leads to the fragmentation of news audiences as well as to increasing selectivity of the members of these audiences (Webster, 2005; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). This picture in one way or another implies aspects of inequality, not least related to how social status and age shape the access to and use of news. Actually,

once can trace news inequality at the global, national, gender and age levels. These divides vary across countries, depending on the national characteristics, such as different media systems. One of the most striking aspects of the digital divide is the difference in news access between developed countries at the core of the world system and poor countries on the periphery. The latter lack digital infrastructures, resources and news media. As noted above, news alternatives are much rarer in less developed countries than in advanced ones.

Moreover, as it is known, the digital divide exists within societies, particularly between age groups. The internet and social media are popular worldwide, especially among younger people. Younger people, although they present a higher percentage of news avoidance than the other age groups, turn to social media for news consumption, not least through their smartphones. With this type of media flood, it would be expected that citizens can obtain news from a variety of sources and hear radically different points of view. However, the multitude of media outlets available does not necessarily mean an increased diversity of viewpoints.

Although the ways in which we can receive TV have expanded rapidly, it cannot confidently be claimed that its content has become more diverse and better quality (Maier, 2010). Television news remains the most important for older groups. However, the overall usage has continued to decline, particularly for “appointment to view” bulletins and amongst younger groups (Newman et al., 2017; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013). As Yuan notes “individual news users integrate multiple media platforms to form personal news repertoires of their own gratifications ... News users actively combine different news media sources, old and new, into complex patterns of media use” (Yuan, 2011: 999).

In one way or another, the new abundant media-rich landscape provides many options and ways in which citizens can be informed. They can consume news by choosing from a variety of media outlets and media platforms with, in most cases, overlapping or even replicated information (see Prior, 2007; Webster, 2005; Yuan, 2011). It seems that people, especially younger ones, tend to replace traditional news outlets, especially newspapers, with the internet. However, the replacement does not necessarily signal the demise of more traditional news media outlets. In addition, according to the Reuters Institute study (Newman et al., 2017), social media are significantly more important for women (who are also less likely to go directly to a news website or app) and for the young. In 2017, more than a quarter of 18-24-year-olds (28%) said that social media are their main source of news, social media exceeding television (24%) for the first time.

Again, there are discrepancies. In France, for example, Monique Dagnaud (2016) studied the online news consumption practices of disenfranchised youths (16-25 years old) from working-class families. Compared with the average youth in the same age category, they much more rarely turn to news websites or read news on blogs. Instead, they are heavier users of social networks, on which they find (rather than they seek), among other stories, short ironic or funny articles or videos.

Other European studies have also demonstrated that the rise of digital technologies has not overcome the inequalities in the consumption of news: far from it. In their quantitative and qualitative analysis of news reception in Sweden, André Jansson and Johan Lindell (2015: 93) highlight the existence of two opposite groups: the first is composed of well-educated urban respondents with “mobile lifestyles”, who were already used to accessing international news through traditional media and who use now a variety of new online media to access them; the second comprises “groups with lower levels of education, among the working classes and in provincial areas”, which are “locally oriented in their news consumption [and] not inclined to appropriate and use new transmedia technologies”.

### Concluding remarks

In one way or another, media environments around the world are changing. The change is not only a change in content but also a change in the ways in which citizens discover, use, consume and interact with content. These new conditions have significant implications for what the media report, the way in which the content is consumed and, finally, the quality of informed citizenship.

It has become clear that technology is not the only necessary condition for the development of new media (in our case, news media). The developments in new technologies and the globalization of markets produce new patterns of advantage and disadvantage that, as we have seen, reinforce old inequalities. Structural social inequality is presumably not disconnected from the inequality in the digital sphere. Digital inequalities are, indeed, embedded in social structures (Helsper, 2012; van Dijk, 2005); thus, digital and social inequalities must be deeply *intertwined*. There is a kind of recurring cycle between social and digital inequality (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2016).

In this digital globalized era, one can see an overwhelming Euro-American dominance of the global news flow in mainstream or alternative media and in news consumption. Furthermore, many small, developing countries and their news media will continue to rely on a news flow that predominantly comes from the West and affluent societies. In other words, the big commercial or public news media will continue to be the dominant players in the world news domain. To sum up, there is a risk, as the OECD’s report entitled *News in the Internet age: New trends in news publishing* states, that citizens will increasingly be split into two different groups: the “information haves”, who, thanks to their social, economic and cultural capital, can benefit fully from the enhanced information ecosystem provided by the internet, and the “information have-nots”, who do not have the same opportunities (OECD, 2010: 103).

On the macro level, the Western news system reinforces its leading position and the less developed countries are forced to follow to close the gap, which nonetheless remains wide. The implications are complex. After the end of the Cold War, the

advent of the internet, the information society and the development of new media came from the West or the more advanced societies. The rest is obliged to follow to keep in touch with the developments or to increase their relative or virtual power in their regions.

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