A Study of the Media Coverage of Georgian Parliamentary Elections 2020

Interim Report
On Social Network Monitoring

July 15 – August 31, 2020

საქართველოს
ჟურნალისტური
ეთიკის ქარტია

Contents

Methodology

The Objective of the Study and the Research Questions

The social network monitoring carried out during the period of 2020 Parliamentary Elections aims to explore what type of information reaches users daily through the social network about ongoing political events in the country. Considering the fact that Facebook is the most popular social network platform in Georgia, monitoring has been carried out to find out how this platform is used by the traditional media, government bodies and electoral subjects and what type of information users receive through Facebook during the election period in Georgia.

Correspondingly, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What type of media outlets have access to the widest audiences via Facebook?

- What types of media products reach the widest audiences?

- How reliable is the information which is spread to the widest audiences?

- What is the ratio between more or less reliable information spread via the social network and problematic media products?

- How does the traditional media, in particular, online and TV media use their Facebook pages to disseminate daily information during the electoral period?

- What kind of information is disseminated through most popular pages and largest open groups?

- How is the social media used by government agencies, political parties and individual politicians as a platform for spreading information during electoral period?

Observation method and sampling

To seek answers to the research questions, daily observation of the following sources was carried out:

1) Facebook pages of 13 online media outlets;

2) Facebook pages of 6 TV channels;

3) 60 open groups;

4) 137 popular pages;

5) Facebook pages of the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, The Mayor of Tbilisi, the head of the Government of Adjara, the Government of Adjara, 11 ministries and 4 ministers;

6) Facebook pages of 12 political parties and 25 individual politicians;

7) 20 most widespread media products (based on the number of interactions) spread through Facebook daily.

Quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the media products shared by the selected sources was carried out every day during the monitoring period. During quantitative observation, attention was paid to which political subjects were portrayed in exaggerated media products and the tone of the media coverage of the respective subjects. During qualitative observation, attention was paid to compliance with journalistic standards of the media products shared through Facebook. Particular attention was paid to observing which media outlet materials were published most frequently by various sources.

Analytical platforms Crowd Tangle and Buzz Sumo were used for data collection.

Limitations of the Study

In accordance with the international practice, the spread range of individual materials through Facebook was determined according to numbers of interactions which the materials accumulated in a given time period.

Definition of terms

Source - Facebook page under observation.

Might be a page of an individual, a political party or a government agency, an entertainment page with high numbers of likes and followers, an official Facebook page of a traditional media outlet or an open group, which is observed during the monitoring.

Author – a media outlet, which prepared the media product shared by the source via Facebook.

Media product – In the following report media product refers to materials prepared by the traditional media, such as articles, videos and other types of multimedia products.

Facebook statuses, post comments, original materials prepared by politicians or government agencies, such as press releases, videos, infographics and other types of campaigning materials are not considered as media products for the purpose of this study and are not analyzed quantitatively.

Traditional media – In the following report traditional media refers to a media outlet, which has its own platform, such as a website, a newspaper, radio or television broadcasting, and which publishes materials on its platform.

More or less reliable information – a media product prepared by traditional media outlets which does not contain gross violations of journalistic standards.

Problematic media product – a media product prepared by traditional media outlets which contains gross violations of journalistic standards, such as publishing unverified and unbalanced information, hate speech dissemination, deliberate spread of disinformation etc.

Number of interactions – cumulative number of various types of emoticons, comments and shares accumulated by individual media products on Facebook.

Most widespread media product – individual media products with the highest numbers of interactions accumulated on Facebook in a given period of time.

Popular page –a Facebook page which is not a personal profile of any individual or a page of a specific company or organization and which is liked by many users.

Open group – A group created on Facebook, joined by a certain number of users, joining which does not require confirmation by the group administrator.

Key Findings

The following major finding have been identified as a result of the monitoring:

- Media products prepared by most widespread television channels and their websites are spread through Facebook; Among various types of media products, the media products prepared by TV channels have the widest reach through Facebook;

- Analysis of materials shared on Facebook pages of TV channels show even more polarization of TV media, compared to their on-air broadcasting;

- Popular Facebook pages rarely share media products which are related to coverage of current political affairs;

- Particularly problematic media products are very rarely seen on popular pages and such materials are rarely spread further by users;

- In open Facebook groups, users quite frequently share media products directly or indirectly referring to political issues;

- A relatively large number of problematic webpages are shared in open groups, however, the area of dissemination of the materials prepared by them and engagement rates of users are small;

- Heads of state and government agencies use their Facebook pages for spreading information about their activities rather than for discrediting their political opponents;

- Facebook pages of political parties and individual politicians often publish insulting materials and mockery of their political opponents, but cases of publishing particularly problematic ma-

terials, which include hate speech, incitement to violence or deliberate disinformation are rare exceptions;

■ Media products prepared by top-rated media outlets well known to the public are most widely spread through Facebook, while particularly problematic materials have less dissemination area and engagement rates by users.

Most widespread media products

During the monitoring period, daily observation was carried out on media products most widely spread through Facebook. 20 media products accumulating the highest numbers of interactions were searched each day using the software Buzz Sumo. In this case, a list of pre-selected media outlets was not used, rather, any type of media product prepared by any media outlet, which had accumulated most interactions on Facebook on a given day was searched for. As a result, during the monitoring period, between July 15 and August 31, 960 most widespread media products, i.e. 20 materials daily were observed. Considering the objectives of the study, only those materials that involved the monitoring subjects were analyzed.

Analysis suggest that media products prepared by top-rated, well known TV channels and online media outlets are most widely spread through Facebook.

Authors of the media products most widely spread daily (>1%):

#	Media outlet	Number of materials	%
1	Mtavari Channel (mtavari.tv)	198	20.9
2	Imedi (imedinews.ge)	117	12.4
3	First Channel of the Public Broadcasting (1tv.ge)	102	10.8
4	interpressnews.ge	96	10.1
5	news.on.ge	75	7.9
6	tabula.ge	61	6.4
7	netgazeti.ge	54	5.7
8	radiotavisupleba.ge	41	4.3
9	Formula (formulanews.ge)	24	2.5
10	batumelebi.netgazeti.ge	19	2
11	ambebi.ge	18	1.9
12	Rustavi 2 (rustavi2.ge)	18	1.9
13	metronome.ge	16	1.7
14	primetime.ge	14	1.5

15	newposts.ge	13	1.4
16	report.ge	11	1.2
17	paraleli.ge	10	1.1

Among the most widespread media products during the monitoring period, materials related to restrictions and government's financial assistance due to COVID-19 pandemic prevailed. For example, highest number of interactions were accumulated by materials "School year will start on September 15 in classrooms" (batumelebi.netgazeti.ge, July 17, 36 280 interactions), „Schools will open on September 15 in classrooms" (radiotavisupleba.ge, August, 25 932 interactions), „Where and how to register to receive 200 GEL assistance for children and adolescents" (imedinews.ge, August 14, 17 682 interactions), „At the start of school year, citizens up to 17 will receive 200-GEL assistance" (1tv.ge, August 6, 16 859 interactions).

During the monitoring period, none of the media products, often referred to as so-called fake news or disinformation, were among the most widespread materials.
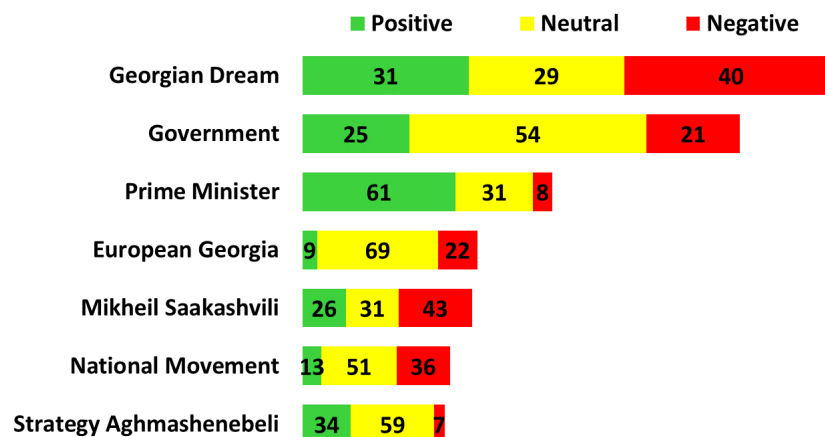
In case of 960 media products analyzed, overall, positive coverage of the Prime Minister and the Strategy Aghmashenebeli and negative coverage of the opposition - United National Movement and European Georgia as well as the ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili prevailed. Particularly high indicators of the positive tone in coverage of the Prime Minister were due to the circumstance that during the monitoring period, general information on government's financial assistance was provided to the public by the Prime Minister, which was respectively reflected in the social networks and wide spreading of positive materials in his respect.

As for the Strategy Aghmashenebeli, the PR strategy of this party and its leader Giorgi Vashadze is based on more representation in the social media, which is indicated by the data of the Facebook advertising library, according to which, in the period between August 4 and September 2, Giorgi Vashadze and Strategy Aghmashenebeli spent most money on political advertising through Facebook compared to other political subjects.

Coverage of subjects among 20 most widespread media products daily (%)
From 15 July to 31 August, 2020
(cumulative analysis of 960 media products in total)

■ Positive   ■ Neutral   ■ Negative

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	31	29	40
Government	25	54	21
Prime Minister	61	31	8
European Georgia	9	69	22
Mikheil Saakashvili	26	31	43
National Movement	13	51	36
Strategy Aghmashenebeli	34	59	7

Monitoring Facebook pages of TV channels

Analysis suggest that media products prepared by TV channels and their websites are the most wide-spread through Facebook – during the monitoring period, top three places among the authors of top 20 daily most widespread media products were taken by television channels.

The main reason for observation of the Facebook pages of TV channels is to examine how on-air broadcasting of the TV channels differs from the information shared through their Facebook pages and how televisions use the social network for dissemination of information in the electoral period. For this purpose, the data gathered as a result of analyzing the materials spread through Facebook pages of TV channels during the monitoring period were compared with the data of TV media monitoring carried out by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics.

TV channels were selected for monitoring based on the following criteria: 1) the channel should have its own actively used website, materials from which are systematically published on a Facebook page; 2) the Facebook page of the TV channel should have over 100 followers.

Considering these criteria, monitoring of Facebook pages of 6 TV channels were carried out:

■ Rustavi 2 (917 000 followers on Facebook);

■ Imedi (748 000 followers);

■ Mtavari Channel (719 000 followers);

■ First Channel of the Public Broadcaster (421 000 followers);

■ Formula (371 000 followers);

■ Ajara TV (114 000 followers).

(the numbers of followers are presented as of September 6)

Quantitative monitoring was carried out daily on all the materials shared through Facebook pages of the selected TV channels, except of long live streams, full recordings of news programs, talk shows and entertainment programs. Only qualitative observation was carried out for the mentioned materials.

Analysis suggest that all the six TV channels quite actively use their websites: rustavi2.ge, imedinews.ge, mtavari.tv, 1tv.ge, formulanews.ge, ajaratv.ge. Over 80 percent of the materials shared through their Facebook pages were initially published on these websites and then shared through Facebook; some of them were presented in a printed article form and some were accompanied by a video report as well.

Monitoring of the materials shared through their pages suggests that Facebook pages of Georgian TV media are even more polarized that their on-air broadcasting.

Monitoring of two television channels: Mtavari Channel and Formula did not reveal dramatic differences between their Facebook pages and on-air broadcasting with regard to the tones of coverage of the monitoring subjects:

Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of Mtavari Channel (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ **Positive**   ■ **Neutral**   ■ **Negative**

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	8	25	67
Government	5	33	62
National Movement	14	77	9
Local Government	1	3	85
European Georgia	14	67	19
President		61	32
Prime Minister	27	54	19
Mikheil Saakashvili	34	37	29

Coverage of subjects during TV broadcasting of Mtavari Channel (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ **Positive**   ■ **Neutral**   ■ **Negative**

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream		22	77
Government		19	80
National Movement	7	87	6
European Georgia		93	7
Local Government	1	3	86
Prime Minister	4	85	1
Alliance of Patriots		80	
President		65	

Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of Formula (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive   ■ Neutral   ■ Negative

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	10	46	44
Government	3	75	22
European Georgia	14	78	8
National Movement		74	22
President	17	70	13
Local Government	37	53	
Alliance of Patriots		56	33
Prime Minister	30	54	16

Coverage of subjects during TV broadcasting of Formula (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive   ■ Neutral   ■ Negative

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	1	50	49
Government		57	42
European Georgia		96	3
National Movement		92	6
Local Government		53	47
Lelo for Georgia		98	
Strategy Aghmashenebeli		84	

In case of four TV channels: First Channel of the Public Broadcaster, Ajara TV, Imedi and Rustavi 2 - sharp differences were observed in terms of the positive coverage of the ruling team.

First Channel of the Public Broadcasting should be particularly mentioned, monitoring of the materials published on Facebook page of which revealed extremely high indicators of the positive tone in the event of the government team coverage:

Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of GPB First Channel (%)

(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive   ■ Neutral   ■ Negative

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	53	26	21
Prime Minister	88	8	4
Government	70	25	5
Mikheil Saakashvili	35	16	49
National Movement	22	46	32
European Georgia	20	41	39
Local Government	80	19	
President	63	30	

Coverage of subjects during TV broadcasting of GPB First Channel (%)

(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive   ■ Neutral   ■ Negative
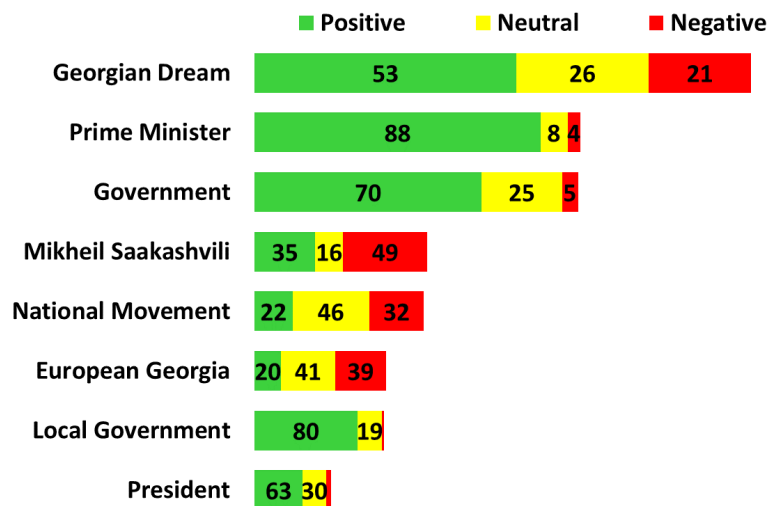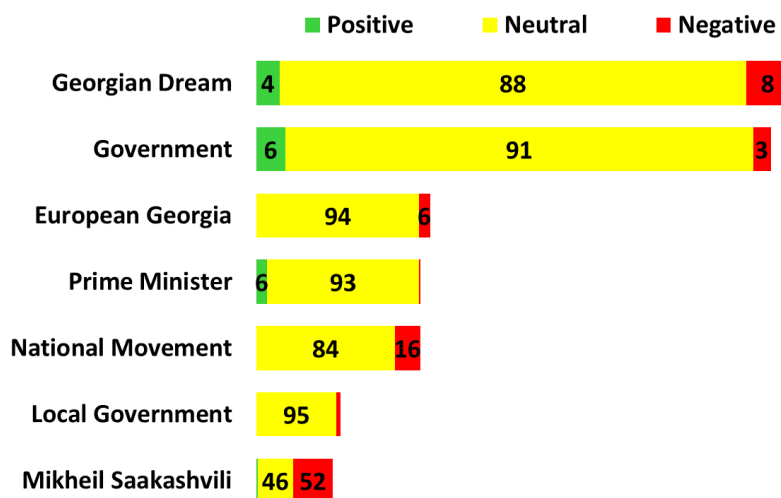
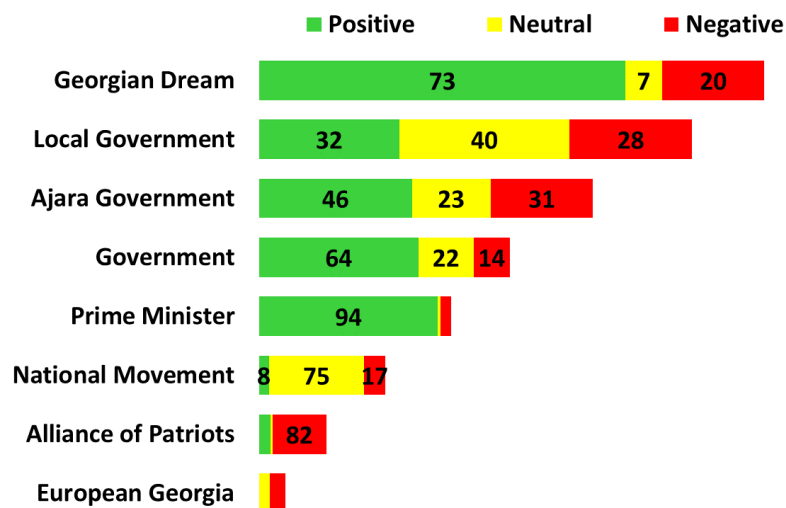| Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	4	88	8
Government	6	91	3
European Georgia		94	6
Prime Minister	6	93	
National Movement		84	16
Local Government		95	
Mikheil Saakashvili		46	52

During the monitoring period, the Facebook page of the First Channel of the Public Broadcasting clearly indicated an attempt at positive only portrayal of the governing team on the one hand and
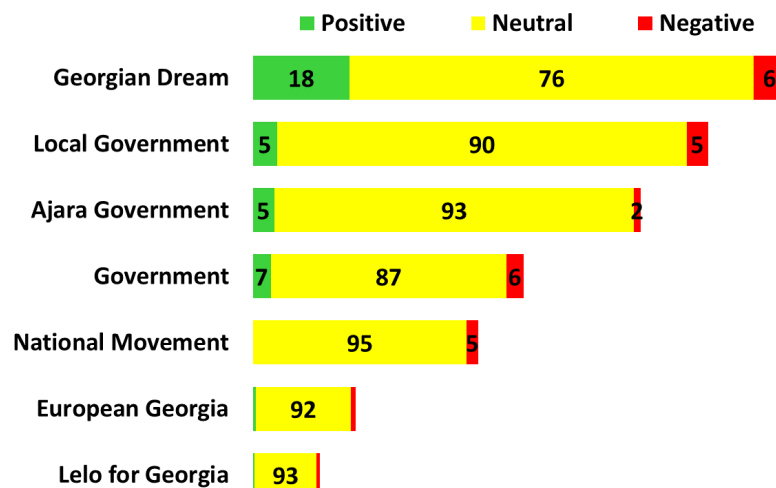
negative portrayal of the oppositional politicians on the other hand. This is confirmed by unprecedentedly high indicators of the positive tone in coverage of the Prime Minister (88%), local governments (80%), the government (70%), the president (63%) and the Georgian Dream (53%).

A sharp difference in terms of positive coverage of the governing team is also observed between on-air broadcasting and materials shared through Facebook page of Adjara TV as well:

Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of TV Ajara (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	73	7	20
Local Government	32	40	28
Ajara Government	46	23	31
Government	64	22	14
Prime Minister	94		
National Movement	8	75	17
Alliance of Patriots			82
European Georgia			

Coverage of subjects during TV broadcasting of TV Ajara (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

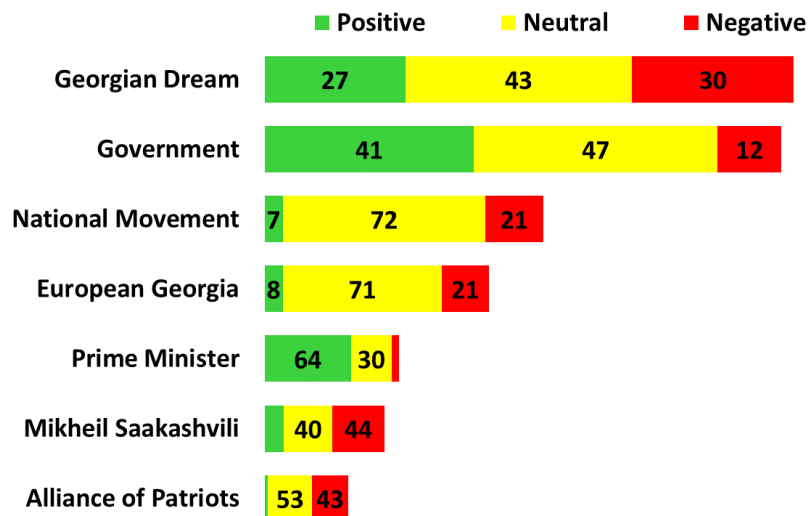|	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	18	76	6
Local Government	5	90	5
Ajara Government	5	93	2
Government	7	87	6
National Movement		95	5
European Georgia		92	
Lelo for Georgia		93	

Similar to the First Channel of the Public Broadcasting, the Facebook page of Ajara TV also revealed extremely high percentages of the positive tone in coverage of the Prime Minister (94%), Georgian Dream (73%) and the Government (64%). However, worth mentioning is the fact that, unlike Facebook page of the First Channel of the Public Broadcasting, Facebook page materials shared through Ajara TV revealed less systematic criticism for the representatives of the oppositional parties.

Differences from the on-air broadcasting were clearly observed on Facebook page of Rustavi 2 as well, where high positive tone indicators in coverage of the governing team also prevailed:
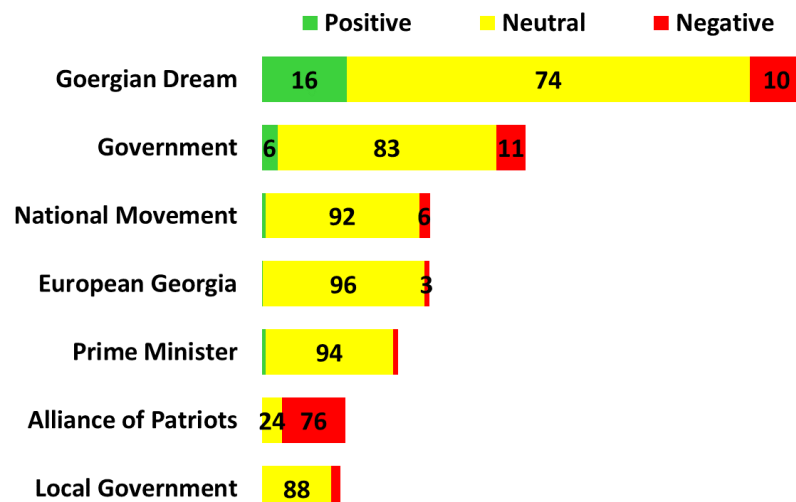
Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of Rustavi 2 (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

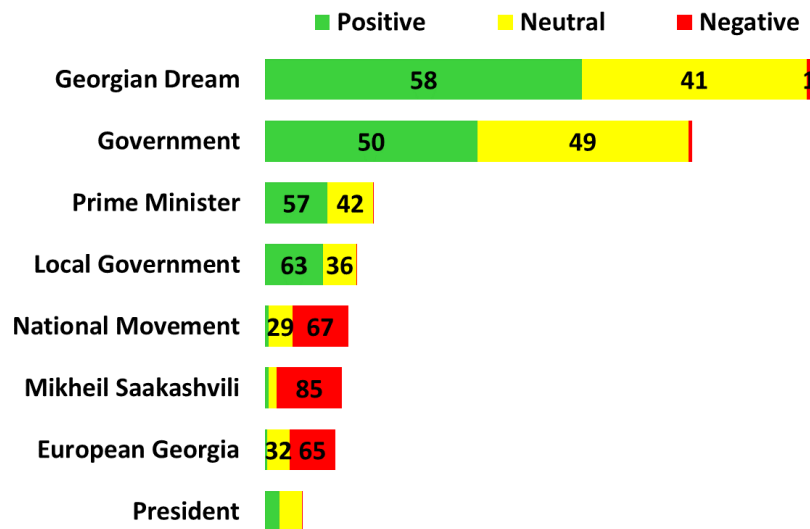## Coverage of subjects during TV broadcasting of Rustavi 2 (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

Indicators for positive coverage of the governing team on Facebook page of Imedi are higher too compared to on-air broadcasting:
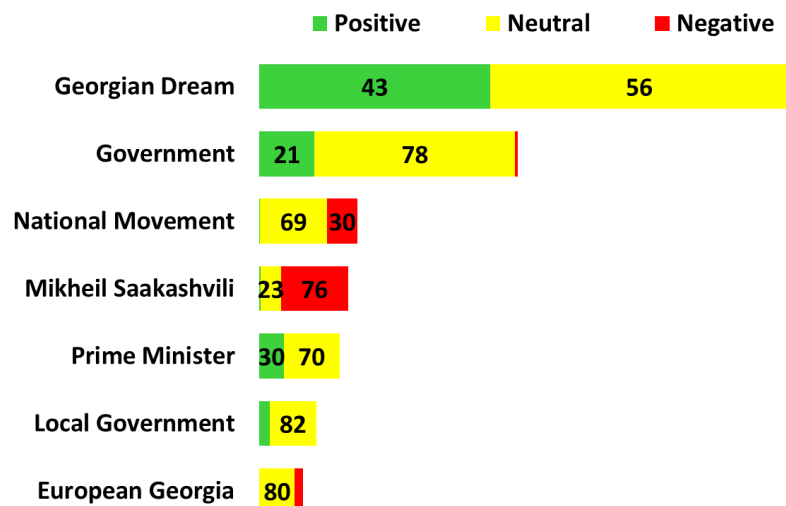
Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of Imedi (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive   ■ Neutral   ■ Negative

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	58	41	1
Government	50	49	
Prime Minister	57	42	
Local Government	63	36	
National Movement	29		67
Mikheil Saakashvili			85
European Georgia	32		65
President			

Coverage of subjects during TV broadcasting of Imedi (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive   ■ Neutral   ■ Negative

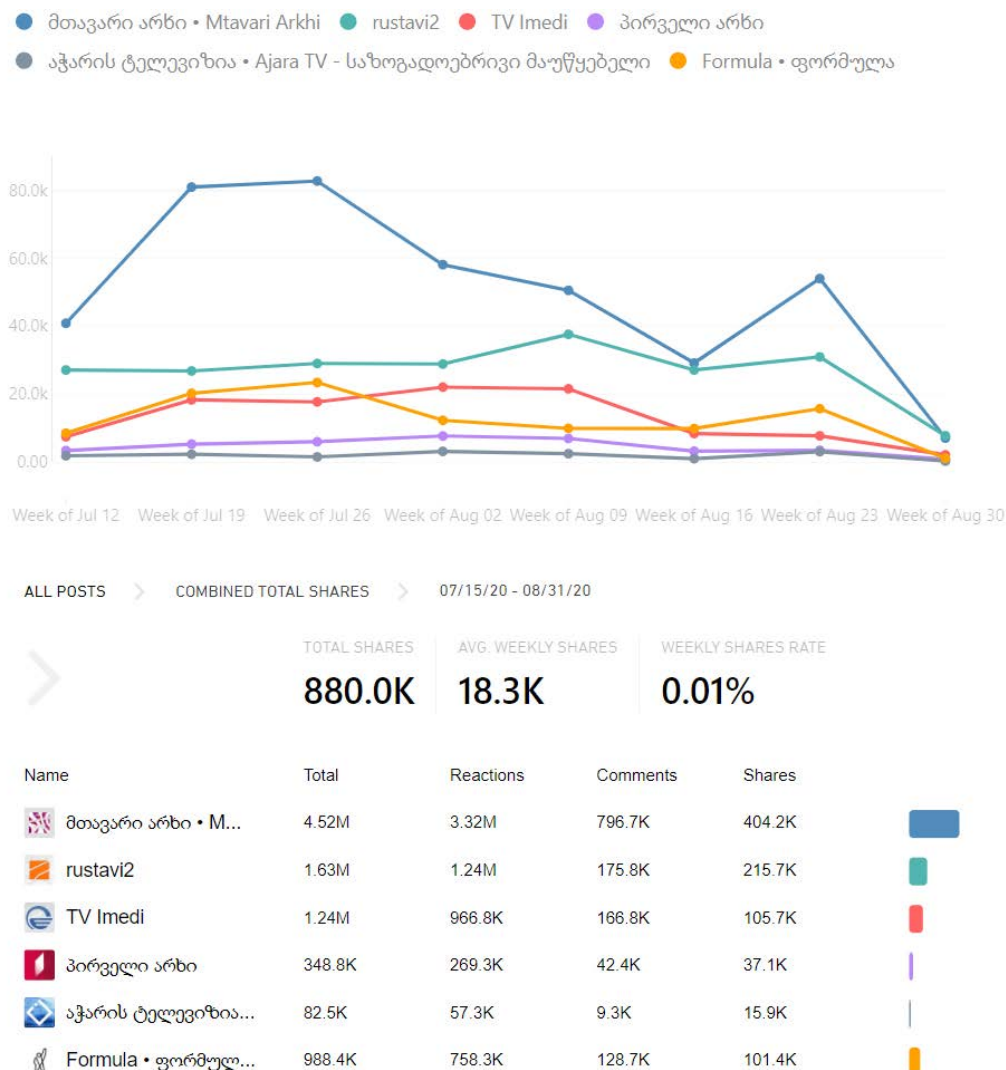| Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Georgian Dream	43	56	
Government	21	78	
National Movement		69	30
Mikheil Saakashvili	23		76
Prime Minister	30	70	
Local Government		82	
European Georgia		80	

Among televisions selected for monitoring, various types of materials gained high interaction rates from users. For example, on Facebook pages of Imedi and First Channel, the highest numbers of interactions were accumulated for news stories and articles providing information on government financial assistance for elimination of the financial crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic. On Mtavari

Channel and Formula, highest numbers of interactions were accumulated for materials dedicated to various high-profile criminal cases.

Monitoring results of Facebook pages of the selected TV channels suggest that materials published on their Facebook pages indicate even more polarization of TV media than their on-air broadcasting. In most of the televisions selected for monitoring, sharp differences were observed between the data gained from analyzing major news programs broadcasted on air and materials shared via their Facebook pages. The difference was mostly evident in extremely positive coverage of the government team on Facebook. First Channel of the Public Broadcasting should particularly be mentioned, which tries to maintain balance better during on-air broadcasting of the coverage of politicians in the electoral period, yet it was found that Facebook page of this channel is not focused on spreading objective and unbiased information on current affairs, but rather on creating and strengthening positive attitudes towards the governing team.
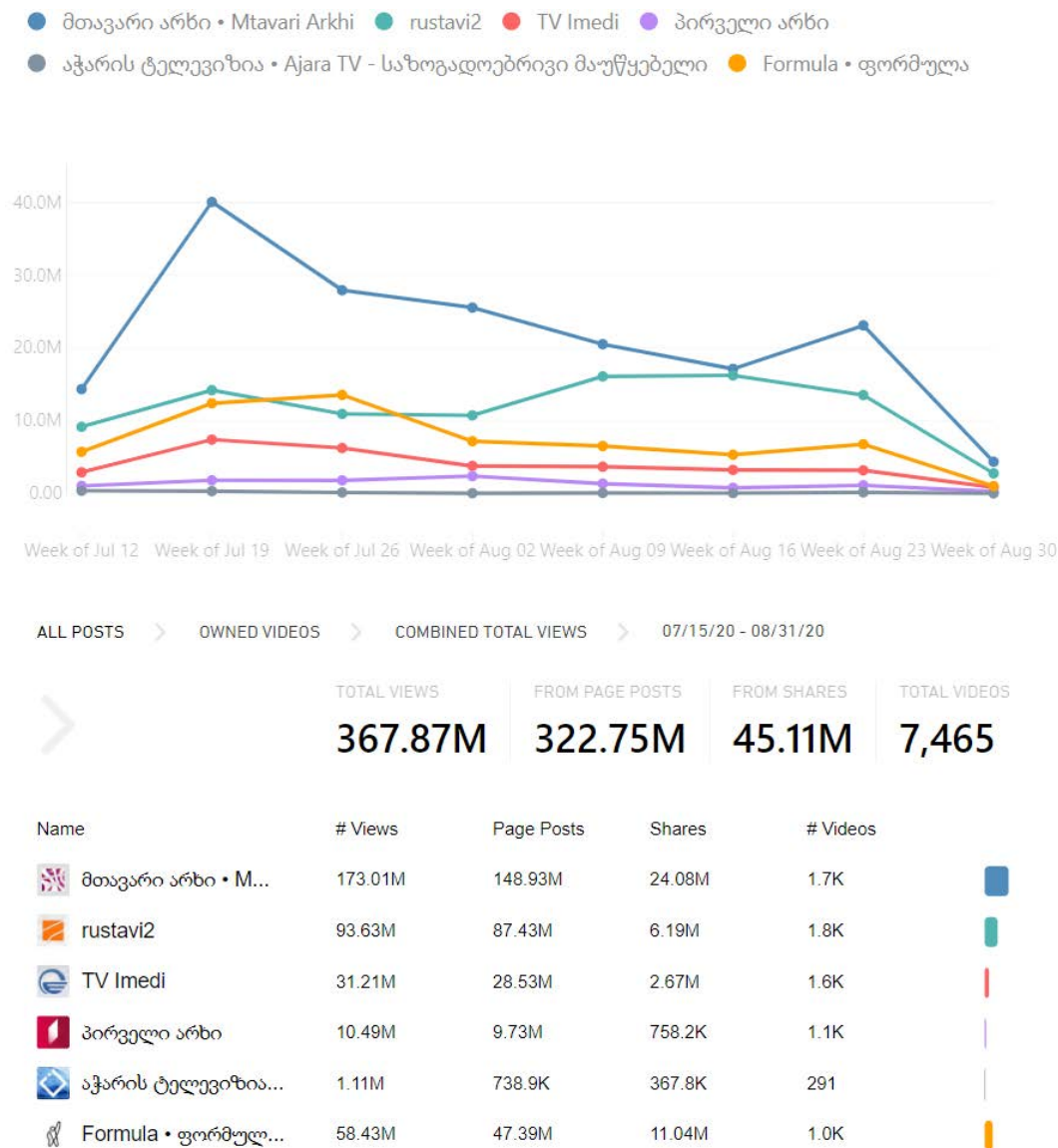
The impact and wide dissemination of media products prepared by Georgian TV channels should particularly be underlined. Statistical data of user sharing of media products prepared by televisions selected for monitoring demonstrated quite high numbers:

(Source: Crowd Tangle)

According to the data, during the monitoring period, Mtavari Channel materials were most frequently shared by users. Materials published on Facebook page of the channel were shared 404 thousand times by users during the 6-week monitoring period.
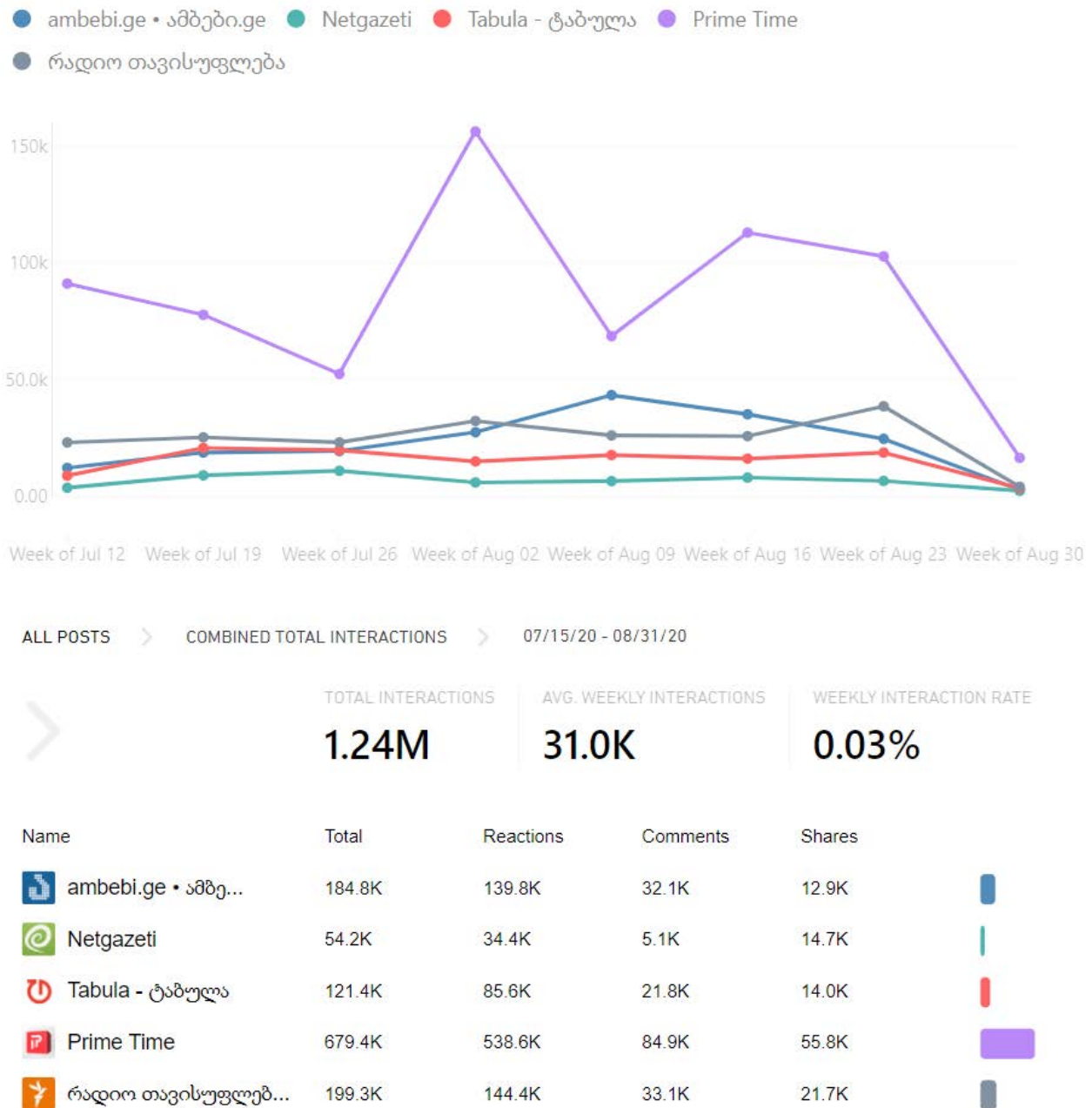
Quite high numbers were revealed while analyzing numbers of views by users of video files shared through Facebook pages of the selected televisions as well:

Name	# Views	Page Posts	Shares	# Videos	
მთავარი არხი • M...	173.01M	148.93M	24.08M	1.7K	
rustavi2	93.63M	87.43M	6.19M	1.8K	
TV Imedi	31.21M	28.53M	2.67M	1.6K	
პირველი არხი	10.49M	9.73M	758.2K	1.1K	
აჭარის ტელევიზია...	1.11M	738.9K	367.8K	291	
Formula • ფორმულ...	58.43M	47.39M	11.04M	1.0K	

ALL POSTS > **OWNED VIDEOS** > **COMBINED TOTAL VIEWS** > 07/15/20 - 08/31/20

TOTAL VIEWS	FROM PAGE POSTS	FROM SHARES	TOTAL VIDEOS
367.87M	322.75M	45.11M	7,465

(Source: Crowd Tangle)

According to the data, during the 6-week monitoring period, total number of views by users of the video files published via Facebook pages of the selected television channels exceeds 367 million. Mtavari channel takes the first place in these data as well. Video materials shared by this channel during the monitoring period were viewed 173 million times by users.

To compare, the dissemination rate through Facebook of media products prepared by online media outlets selected for monitoring is much smaller. Out of the top-rated media outlets selected for on-line media monitoring, the following five websites accumulated the highest numbers of shares of published materials through their Facebook pages:

Name	Total	Reactions	Comments	Shares	
ambebi.ge • ამბე...	184.8K	139.8K	32.1K	12.9K	
Netgazeti	54.2K	34.4K	5.1K	14.7K	
Tabula - ტაბულა	121.4K	85.6K	21.8K	14.0K	
Prime Time	679.4K	538.6K	84.9K	55.8K	
რადიო თავისუფლებ...	199.3K	144.4K	33.1K	21.7K	

ALL POSTS > COMBINED TOTAL INTERACTIONS > 07/15/20 - 08/31/20

TOTAL INTERACTIONS	AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS	WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE
1.24M	31.0K	0.03%

(Source: Crowd Tangle)

According to the data, during the monitoring period, the highest number of material shares by users – 55,8 thousand was accumulated by primetime.ge.

By comparing the statistical data, the enormous impact TV channels make on Facebook in terms of spreading information, becomes even more evident.

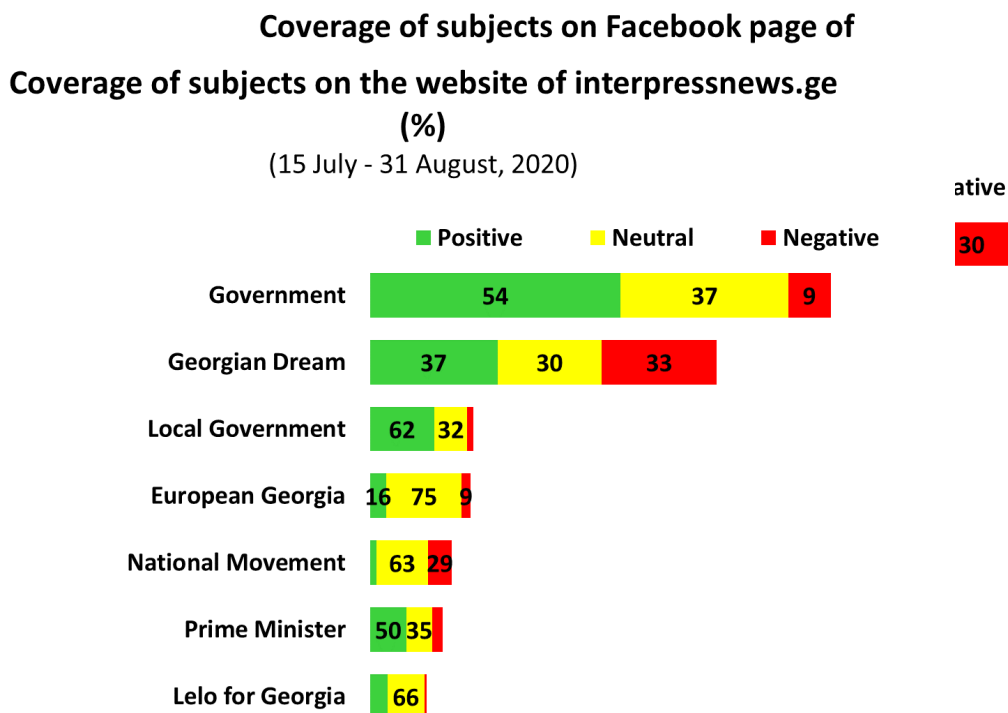# Monitoring Facebook pages of online media outlets

During the monitoring period, observation of online media outlets was also carried out. The purpose of the observation was to study whether the information provided to users from websites of the online media differs from the information provided by them through their Facebook pages.

For this purpose, the data gained as a result of analyzing the materials spread through Facebook pages of online media outlets during the monitoring period were compared with the data of online media monitoring carried out by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics.

Observation was carried out for 13 online media outlets: ambebi.ge, interpressnews.ge, kvira.ge, mpn.ge, netgazeti.ge, news.on.ge, primetime.ge, publika.ge, radiotavisupleba.ge, reginfo.ge, sknews.ge, sputnik-georgia.com, tabula.ge.
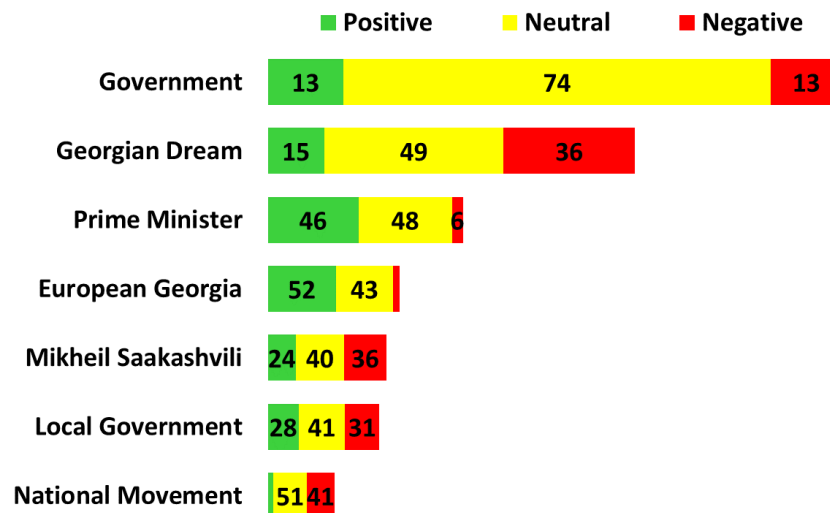
The observation revealed that 11 out of 13 selected media outlets placed all materials published on the websites on their Facebook pages. Therefore, in case of 11 out of 13 online media outlets, materials spread through Facebook were absolutely identical to those published on websites by the selected online media outlets.

Only two online media outlets: interpressnews.ge and ambebi.ge did not share all materials on their Facebook pages, but only some of the materials published on their websites. Analyzing the media products published on the Facebook pages of the mentioned two online media outlets indicated that despite minor differences, no serious difference can be observed between the data gained as a result of analyzing the materials spread via their Facebook pages and those published on their websites:
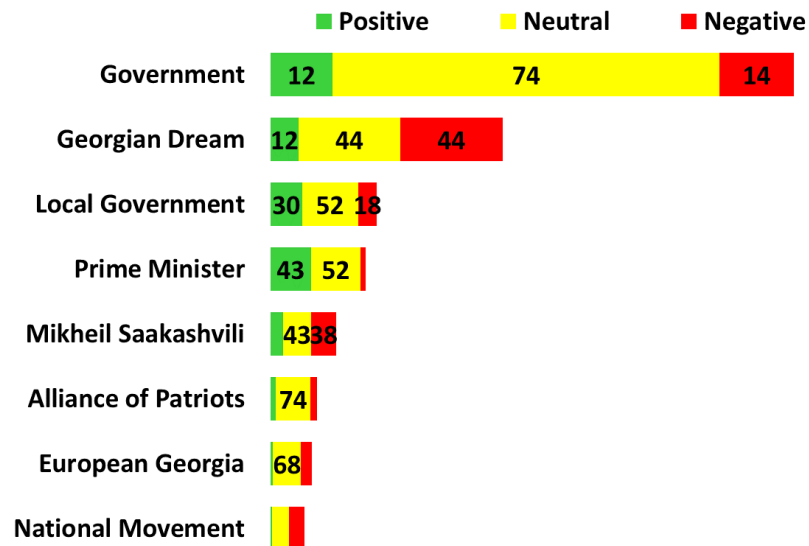
Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of

Coverage of subjects on the website of interpressnews.ge (%)

(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

Coverage of subjects on Facebook page of ambebi.ge (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Government	13	74	13
Georgian Dream	15	49	36
Prime Minister	46	48	6
European Georgia	52	43	
Mikheil Saakashvili	24	40	36
Local Government	28	41	31
National Movement		51	41

Coverage of subjects on the webpage of ambebi.ge (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Government	12	74	14
Georgian Dream	12	44	44
Local Government	30	52	18
Prime Minister	43	52	
Mikheil Saakashvili		43	38
Alliance of Patriots		74	
European Georgia		68	
National Movement			

Monitoring results suggest that all the thirteen online media outlets selected for monitoring spread same types of materials through their Facebook pages as through their websites.

(detailed analysis of online media outlets may be found in the report on online media monitoring carried out by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics)

Monitoring popular Facebook pages

As part of the monitoring, observation was carried out on Facebook pages, which do not represent pages of particular individuals, unions, organizations or commercial companies and which are liked by many users.
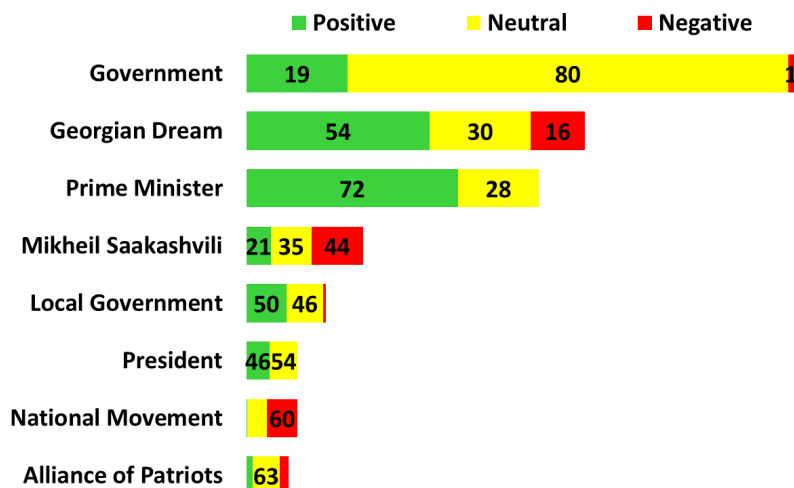
The main reason for monitoring popular pages was to find out what kinds of media products are disseminated through such pages during the electoral period. Special attention was paid to analyzing which media outlets prepared the media products most frequently spread by such pages, which politicians or political parties they related to and how reliable was the information shared by popular Facebook pages.

Pages with over 40,000 likes on Facebook were selected for observation. 137 such pages were identified by using analytical platforms Crowd Tangle and Buzz Sumo. Daily observation of all media products shared by the selected 137 pages was carried out during the monitoring period.

The observation indicated that Facebook pages with high numbers of likes very rarely share media products related to political issues. 109 out of 137 pages did not share any single media product related to politics and politicians during the monitoring period. Such pages mostly shared humorous and religious materials. Most interactions very also gathered by such materials.

Only one Facebook page, named „Gogaggg", was identified, which intensively shared media products related to political issues. It is also noteworthy, that Gogaggg has the highest – 608 thousand likes among the popular Facebook pages selected for monitoring. The observation indicated that articles from only two media outlets - information agencies pia.ge and digest.pia.ge were shared by this page. During the monitoring period, Gogaggg published 129 articles prepared by those two agencies, representing monitoring subjects. Analysis of the articles revealed high positive tone indicators in the coverage of the government team on the one hand, and high negative tone indicators in the coverage of the oppositional parties on the other:

Coverage of subjects on Facebook page Gogaggg (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

Subject	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Government	19	80	1
Georgian Dream	54	30	16
Prime Minister	72	28	
Mikheil Saakashvili	21	35	44
Local Government	50	46	
President	46	54	
National Movement		60	
Alliance of Patriots	63		

During the monitoring period, a total number of 107 media products were shared by other popular pages. Top ten authors of such products are as follows:

#	Media outlet	Number of shared media products
1	Mtavari Channel	23
2	imedinews.ge	7
3	mshoblebi.ge	7
4	alt-info.com	6
5	bm.ge	4
6	1tv.ge	4
7	metronome.ge	3
8	publika.ge	3
9	interpressnews.ge	3
10	formulanews.ge	3

Data analysis suggest that during the monitoring period popular Facebook pages also shared materials prepared by top-rated TV channels and their webpages most frequently.

The shared media products rarely comprised of problematic materials such as those involving hate speech, incitement to violence or deliberate, obvious disinformation.

Cases of sharing problematic materials were observed on only two popular pages - „Alt-info - ალტ-ინფო" and „Alt-club". Both shared media products prepared by the website alt-info.com as well as their own original materials. Through live streams, they broadcasted their own discussion and analytical program „დღის ამბები" ("Daily news") as well. The materials shared by these two pages were mostly identical and represented attempts of discrediting modern Western values, one-sided and biased analysis of social and political problems within the NATO and the EU zone and an attempt to exaggerate confrontations between the states within these unions, as well as criticism of liberalism etc. These two pages mostly provided criticism of both governing party and the opposition as those carrying out liberal policy. Discussions in Daily News often involved anti-western, propagandist messages.

Observation of popular Facebook pages suggests that such pages quite rarely spread media products related to elections or political issues. Analysis of shared materials indicate that popular pages also most frequently share media products prepared by top-rated TV channels and their websites. Sharing particularly problematic media products was a rare exception. Only two popular pages sharing such materials were identified; however, it should be mentioned that compared to other popular pages, these two pages have quite a small number of followers - 43 000 and 57 000, while media products they share have quite low interaction rate indicators.

Monitoring Open Groups

During the monitoring period, observation of open Facebook groups was carried out. The main purpose of the observation was to study what kinds of media products are spread through large Facebook groups during the electoral period. Special attention was paid to observing which media outlets prepared the media products most frequently spread through open groups, which politicians or political parties they related to and how reliable was the information shared within open Facebook groups.

Open groups with over 100,000 members were selected for observation. 60 such open groups were identified by using analytical platforms Crowd Tangle and Buzz Sumo. Observation was carried for all media products shared within such groups during the monitoring period

Unlike popular Facebook pages, quite high numbers of media products were shared daily by members of the selected open groups. During the first period of monitoring, selected open groups shared a total number of 2227 media products which covered activities of politicians or government agencies and which directly or indirectly related to electoral issues. Among over half of the selected groups, such media products were quite actively, often daily shared by various members.
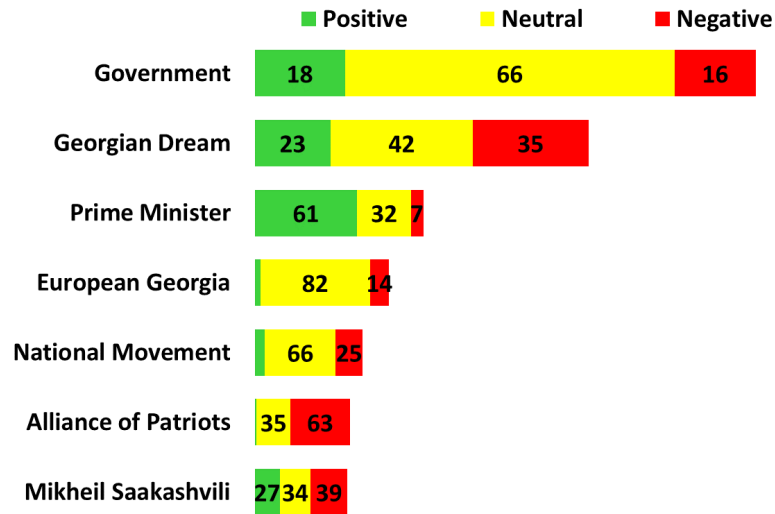
Top ten authors of the media products shared in open groups:

#	Media outlet	Number of shared media products	%
1	accentnews.ge	312	14
2	news.on.ge	213	9.6
3	formulanews.ge	178	8
4	tabula.ge	141	6.3
5	heretifm.com	131	5.9
6	report.ge	129	5.8
7	netgazeti.ge	103	4.6
8	sportliga.ge	92	4.1
9	cyc.ge	67	3
10	avianews.ge	64	2.9

Based on the overall data of analyzing all media products shared in open groups during the monitoring period, high positive tone indicators were revealed during the coverage of the Prime Minister, while high negative tone indicators – during the coverage of the Alliance of Patriots. The data were quite balanced during the coverage of other monitoring subjects:

Coverage of subjects in open Facebook groups (%)
(15 July - 31 August, 2020)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Government	18	66	16
Georgian Dream	23	42	35
Prime Minister	61	32	7
European Georgia		82	14
National Movement		66	25
Alliance of Patriots		35	63
Mikheil Saakashvili	27	34	39

High number of the media products portraying the Prime Minister positively is due to the fact that during the monitoring period, open groups actively shared materials about the statements of the Prime Minister on state financial assistance packages. Such media products received the highest indicators in open groups as well.

Unlike popular Facebook pages, open groups most frequently shared media products prepared by online media outlets rather than TV channels. Top ten most frequently shared authors generally included top-rated, well known online media outlets. Yet, open groups frequently shared media products from less known and sometimes questionable online media outlets as well. Worth mentioning are three websites - ntv.ge, sport.ntv.ge and videosport.ntv.ge, materials from which were relatively frequently shared in open groups. These materials mainly present statements and evaluations of politicians and experts regarding the ongoing political affairs. No positive or negative attitudes towards any political forces were observed on these websites and particularly problematic articles were not published either. It should be questioned why pages systematically covering political issues are named similar to sports websites. Open groups also shared other websites names of which were similar to sports websites, yet, they covered political issues instead of sports. Furthermore, some of such websites frequently published problematic media products including obvious disinformation. Sometimes it was difficult to determine whether the materials spread were disinformation or a joke. For example, sport90.ge and sportliga.ge published an article „It becomes compulsory to lose virginity before the age of 30 in Georgia" accompanied with a photo of a representative of the ruling party, making an impression that the mentioned information was true. sportvideo.ge published an article „Biggest tragedy in Ivanishvili Family, which has just become known". The article is about the issue that, according to Bloomberg data, the property of Bidzina Ivanishvili was reduced by 80 million USD. It seems fair to consider such articles as deliberate disinformation and falsification of facts, because the author websites systematically cover significant political, rather than humorous issues. Therefore, it can be concluded that frequent sharing of media products by authors which are definitely questionable and problematic are observed in open Facebook groups.

Monitoring open groups indicates that media products related to political issues are frequently shared in such groups. The majority of the shared materials are media products from top-rated, well known. Yet, clearly questionable websites appear as well. Worth mentioning is the fact, that questionable and problematic materials usually do not accumulate high numbers of interactions and therefore, the rate of their dissemination through Facebook is small. However, special attention should be paid to increased number of problematic websites, the names of which are similar to sports websites, but the majority of which only cover political issues. The purpose of spreading clear disinformation and false news by such websites is also unclear as the majority of them do not show clear positive or negative attitudes towards any political forces.

Monitoring Facebook pages of heads of state and government agencies

Observation was carried out on how politicians and representatives of government agencies used the social media as a platform for spreading information during the electoral period. For this purpose, daily observation was carried out for Facebook pages of heads of state and government agencies.

Official Facebook pages of the following figures and agencies were selected for monitoring:

- President;
- Prime Minister;
- Speaker of Parliament;
- 11 ministries;
- 4 ministers, which had verified Facebook page by the beginning of the monitoring (Davit Zalkaliani, Ivane Machavariani, Mikheil Chkhenkeli, Irakli Garibashvili);
- Government of Georgia page;
- Tbilisi City Hall;
- Tbilisi Mayor;
- Government of Adjara;
- Head of the Government of Adjara.

During the monitoring period, observation was carried out on all materials shared through Facebook pages of the mentioned figures and agencies. Quantitative analysis was conducted for media products prepared by traditional media outlets, while for posts, originally prepared videos and photo reports shared through Facebook pages of the selected sources, qualitative observation was implemented.

The main purpose of the observation was to study whether the heads of state and the government agencies use their Facebook pages for promotion of their activities or for discrimination of political

opponents during the election period. Particular attention was paid to whether the information they shared included insulting or discriminatory terminology or content.
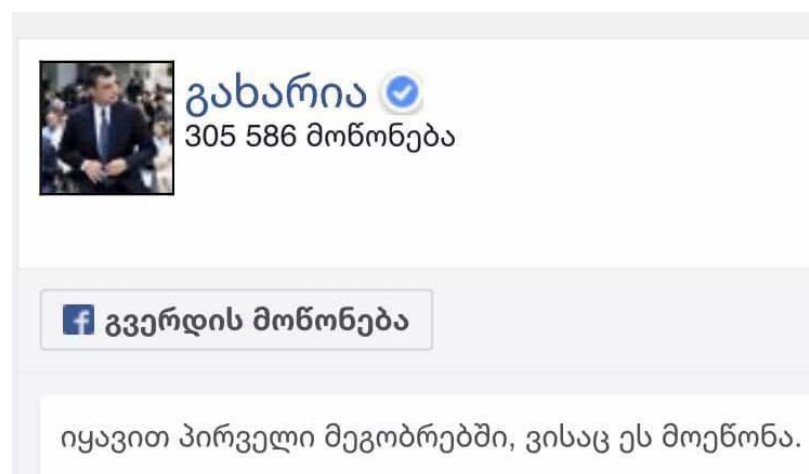
Analysis suggest that during the monitoring period the selected sources mostly used their Facebook pages for spreading information regarding their activities.

No single case was found of information spread through social network pages of heads of state or government agencies demonstrated attempts at discrediting political opponents during the monitoring period

Facebook pages of heads of state and government agencies mostly shared originally prepared materials and there were fewer cases of sharing media products prepared by the traditional media. Media products shared through their Facebook pages mostly represented recordings of the participation of government agency representatives in various television talk shows and news stories prepared by the traditional media about activities of these agencies. During the monitoring period, their Facebook pages shared materials prepared by the following media outlets:

#	Media outlet	Number of shared media products
1	Imedi	68
2	Maestro	20
3	First Channel of the Public Broadcasting	7
4	Post TV	5
5	Rustavi 2	3
6	Adjara TV	2
7	Palitra News	1

During the monitoring period, one problematic case was revealed. The personal Facebook page of the Prime Minister was provided at the website established for the purposes of financial assistance of the Government. As part of the governmental financial assistance envisaged for eradication of financial crisis due to COVID 19 pandemic, a special government website was launched on August 15, 2020, where parents were able to register their children under the age of 17, after which they would receive 200 GEL assistance from the Government for each child. During registration on this website, personal Facebook page of the Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia was visible on the background, with an option to like the page.

Worth mentioning is the fact that from the day the website was launched, August 15, until the end of the first reporting period, September 6, the number of likes of the personal Facebook page of Giorgi Gakharia increased from 295 thousand to 309 thousand.

Monitoring Facebook pages of political parties and politicians

During the monitoring period, daily observation of Facebook pages of political parties and individual politicians was carried out. The main purpose of the observation was to determine the way Georgian politicians and political parties used the social network as a platform for spreading information during the election period. Special attention was paid to whether the information they shared through Facebook included hate speech, incitement to violence or any types of discrimination against opponents.

During the monitoring period, all types of materials shared daily by the selected political parties and individual politicians through their Facebook pages were observed. In the event of sharing media products, quantitative analysis of these products was carried out. Qualitative observation took place for other types of data, such as posts, infographics, campaign videos or any other materials.

Facebook pages of the following 12 parties were selected for monitoring:

- Georgian Dream (154 000 followers on Facebook)
- Girchi (154 000 followers)
- Labour Party (117 000 followers)
- United National Movement (102 000 followers)
- Lelo for Georgia (89 000 followers)
- Free Democrats (68 000 followers)
- Strategy Aghmashenebeli (67 000 followers)
- European Georgia (55 000 followers)
- Alliance of Patriots (39 000 followers)
- Republican Party (11 000 followers)
- Georgian March (5000 followers)
- Democratic Movement – United Georgia (1400 followers)

Selection of individual politicians for monitoring was carried out through the following criteria:

a)   In the event of Parliamentary parties, more than one politician was selected from the party (members of the political council or politicians occupying high political positions within the party who are well known to the public and have verified Facebook pages);

b)   In the event of non-parliamentary parties, only chairpersons of the parties were selected.

As a result, Facebook pages of the following 25 politicians were observed daily during the monitoring period:

Georgian Dream: Irakli Kobakhidze, Mamuka Mdinaradze, Giorgi Volski, Sozar Subari, Irakli Nakashidze;

United National Movement: Roman Gotsiridze, Tinatin Bokuchava, Salome Samadashvili, Grigol Vashadze, Nika Melia;

European Georgia: Davit Bakradze, Gigi Ugulava, Elene Khoshtaria, Giorgi Kandelaki;

Alliance of Patriots: Irma Inashvili, Ada Marshania;

Chairpersons of non-parliamentary parties: Mamuka Khazaradze, Zurab Japaridze, Giorgi Vashadze, Khatuna Samnidze, Nino Burjanadze, Shalva Shavgulidze, Shalva Natelashvili, Sandro Bregadzde;

As an exception, a non-party politician: Mikheil Saakashvili.

Only publicly shared materials were observed from Facebook pages of the selected politicians.

(Note: by the end of the first period of monitoring, the chairperson of Free Democrats, Shalva Shavgulidze left the party, therefore, his Facebook page will not be observed during the following monitoring periods. While the Chairperson of the political council of European Georgia – Giga Bokeria did not have a verified Facebook page at the beginning of the monitoring period, therefore, his Facebook page will be observed only during the following monitoring periods).

The observation indicated that selected political parties and individual politicians very rarely spread news-style media products through their Facebook pages. The media products shared through their pages almost always represented various types of interviews and parts of television talk shows, to which party members were invited.

Media products shared through Facebook pages of parliamentary parties and their members were prepared by the following media outlets:

Georgian Dream		
#	Media outlet	Number of materials shared
1	Imedi	28
2	Rustavi 2	17
3	Maestro	12
4	Post TV	12
5	Palitra News	11
6	First Channel of the Public Broadcasting	2
7	interpessnews.ge	1
8	gazetiajara.ge	1

United National Movement		
#	Media outlet	Number of materials shared
1	Mtavari Channel	59
2	TV Pirveli	54
3	Palitra News	36
4	Formula	30
5	Rustavi 2	22
6	Kavkasia	13
7	interpressnews.ge	1
8	qronikaplus.ge	1
9	amerikiskhma.com	1
10	Radio Georgian Times	1

European Georgia		
#	Media outlet	Number of materials shared
1	TV Pirveli	22
2	Formula	17
3	tabula.ge	15
4	Mtavari Channel	10
5	Rustavi 2	6
6	interpressnews.ge	5
7	Palitra News	3
8	bm.ge	2
9	ambrolauriskhma.ge	2
10	TV Odishi	2
11	First Channel of the Public Broadcasting	1
12	Kavkasia	1
13	radiotavisupleba.ge	1
14	netgazeti.ge	1
15	news.on.ge	1
16	publika.ge	1
17	amerikiskhma.com	1

Alliance of Patriots		
#	Media outlet	Number of materials shared
1	tinp.ge	17
2	Media Union Obiektivi	14
3	TV Pirveli	2
4	First Channel of the Public Broadcasting	2
5	Second Channel of the Public Broadcasting	1
6	Maestro	1
7	Rustavi 2	1
8	Post TV	1
9	mpn.ge	1
10	xnews.ge	1

Analysis suggest that during the monitoring period, media products from top-rated TV channels were most frequently shared through Facebook pages of political parties and individual politicians.

Apart from media products, all types of materials shared by political parties and politicians through their Facebook pages were observed in order to examine the extent of political confrontation towards opponents and whether the materials shared by them contained hate speech or any type of serious discrimination. Analysis suggest that despite systematic use of the social network for campaigning and criticizing their opponents, practically no extremely gross violations, such as the use of hate speech in relation to opponents or incitement to violence were observed on Facebook pages of the parties. More or less insulting materials and mockery of opponents were often shared; for example, European Georgia shared video files named "Top 50 beatings[1] of GDs by EGs". The videos showed hard questions asked by the members of European Georgia and their comments to representatives of the ruling party during parliamentary sessions. Georgian Dream published a mocking status of the ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili accompanied by the text „Miha hamodiii" (Misha come [to Georgia]). Similar mockery and insulting materials were frequently shared through Facebook pages of various parties. However, it should be mentioned again, that cases of hate speech, incitement to violence or discrimination on the basis of gender or any other basis were not observed on the Facebook pages of political parties. Such cases were more evident on pages of some individual politicians. For example, during the monitoring period, a status of the ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili was observed containing gender discrimination against the Minister of Justice Thea Tsulukiani, where the ex-president called the minister "ugly":

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1   A funny slang („მიჯირყვნა") is used in Georgian, meaning something like defeating/winning against somebody and making them feel weak/a loser (translator's comment)

Statements containing hate speech and extremely insulting terminology were systematically shared by the leader of Georgian March - Sandro Bregadze via his Facebook page. Sandro Bregadze shared statuses and live recordings via his Facebook page in which systematic use of extremely insulting terminology and hate speech were present. For example, in his phrases "I would like to tell to this shipskin hatted faggot – you - fecal mass worm, shut up or I will shut you up!!!"; „Georgian Dream names LGBT activist, the one praising sodomy, the one deserving an LGBT armband - Levan Kobiashvili as an MP candidate … Kobiashvili, wait for hell!!!".

Unverified and unproven information, anti-western and quite often anti-Turkish statements were found in materials shared by the members of the Alliance of Patriots. For example, their Facebook page shared an article prepared by tinp.ge, with the statements of one of the members of the Alliance of Patriots, Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, which included clearly misleading messages towards the NATO; for example, in phrases: „...but the Black Sea basin countries are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. All these countries have confrontations with each other or with us"; „Turkey and Iran are historic enemies of each other and both are our enemies" („*The only way out for Georgia today is to maintain the policy of not taking sides – Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi*", tinp.ge, August 11, 2020).

Monitoring results suggest that to a certain degree, insulting and mocking materials against opponents are often shared through Facebook pages of political parties and some politicians. However, in the most cases, these materials are more or less within the ethical limits of political debate and

opposition and cases of hate speech, incitement to violence and obvious disinformation are only found as exceptions. Hate speech was systematically found on Facebook webpage of the leader of Georgian March - Sandro Bregadze, while cases of spreading anti-western messages were found in materials shared by the Alliance of Patriots.

It is also worth mentioning, that apart from some exceptions, there were no cases of spreading questionable media outlets and deliberate disinformation via social networks by political parties and politicians. Such exceptions were only found on Facebook pages of the Alliance of Patriots and Georgian March. The remaining political parties mostly shared products of the top-rated, well known media outlets.

Conclusion

Monitoring of Facebook during election period suggests that in case of Georgia, problematic media products, often referred to as deliberate disinformation or the so-called fake news, have less impact and dissemination rates among users.

Most widely spread media products through Facebook are those produced by top-rated, well known media outlets. Particularly wide dissemination of media products prepared by TV channels through the social network was evident. Some of the mentioned channels seem to be attempting more to maintain balance in covering political issues during on-air broadcasting, while they spread more unbalanced information through their Facebook pages.

Politicians and political parties often use Facebook pages to insult political opponents. Yet, sharing particularly problematic materials, such as spreading statements containing hate speech and deliberate disinformation, is a minor exception.

Popular groups and open groups having many members on Facebook mostly share media products prepared by top-rated media outlets well known to the public. At times, especially while monitoring open groups, cases of sharing problematic materials prepared by questionable and problematic online media outlets were also observed. However, the study indicated that such problematic media outlets and their products are less widespread among users through Facebook.