Israeli News Sites in Russian Language Evaluation and Comparison to News Sites in Hebrew /

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Abstract

The present study evaluates Israeli Russian-language news sites while comparing them to similar Hebrew sites. The goal of the study was to examine the differences in content, currency, objectivity of information, form of presentation and design patterns between Russian and Hebrew Israeli sites. The findings are important for determining whether Russian-language Israeli news sites are one of the channels of Israeli media, providing current information relevant for the whole Israeli society, or serve the interests of Russian-speaking community.

Research questions:

1. Are there differences in coverage and currency of information presented in Russian-language Israeli news, and in their Hebrew counterparts?

2. Are there differences in objectivity and credibility of information presented in Russian-language Israeli news, and in their Hebrew counterparts?

3. Are there differences in level of interactivity and design patterns of Russian and Hebrew Israeli sites?

4. Is the share of the news related to Israel similar in Russian-language sites compared to their Hebrew counterparts?

Two hypotheses were suggested:

H1: The coverage of the news and the currency of the information in Russianlanguage news sites are lower compared to Hebrew- language sites.

H2: Russian-language news sites publish fewer items related to Israel and more news related to CIS (former USSR) and Russian immigrants' community in Israel compared to Hebrew- language sites.

The sample sites were chosen using Israeli internet portals and search engines, after an initial mapping, additional filtering was conducted according to research

requirements. The sample contained six Russian-language and five Hebrew Israeli news sites. Based on theoretical literature and earlier researchers in area of digital media evaluation, following criteria were set: authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, coverage, interactivity, design, services and content distribution. Each criterion was examined by a set of parameters, which were tuned during the pretest.

The evaluation of the parameters was performed in three ways:

(1) Evaluation of criteria related to invariable aspects of the site (e.g. design, archive) was conducted several times during the research period. Due to the dynamic nature of internet sites, some properties were changed during that period. The final results reflect the state as it was at the end of the research;
(2) Evaluation of criteria that require repeating examination of published content (e.g. currency, content distribution) was conducted by continuous monitoring sites' publications and random examination of titles and update times;

(3) Evaluation of criteria that require comprehensive testing of published items (e.g. objectivity, accuracy, coverage) was accomplished by in-depth analysis of articles published by sites tested, following same event. The articles were copied and stored for future analysis and testing with automatic tools. To ensure credibility of the results, evaluation of parameters requiring subjective judgment (e.g. bias, coverage depth) was supported by second opinion of another examiner.

The results of evaluation show that for most parameters Israeli Hebrew sites are ahead of Russian-language sites. The most significant differences were found in criteria of coverage, currency and credibility of information and in interactivity of the sites. However, sites in both languages got similar grades in objectivity of reporting. Overall only in two criteria- design and additional services- the Russian sites received higher grades that the Hebrew ones, although the differences were rather in Hebrew sites, but not to a large extent, where the difference is mainly explained by higher percentage of international news in Russian- language sites. The findings provide following answers to research questions:

1. There is a difference in coverage and currency of information published by news sites in the two languages. Russian- language sites issue smaller number of articles per day and provide less detailed and less current information.

2. No difference was found in the objectivity level of the Russian- language sites compared to Hebrew sites; nevertheless, the Hebrew sites were evaluated as more creditable. That is mainly caused by insufficient disclosure of administrative information and goals of the sites, and lack of the mention of authors by Russian- language sites.

3. No significant difference was found in design patterns of the sites in the two languages, nonetheless Russian- language sites got higher grade due to more readable style of design. However, serious gaps were found between the levels of interactivity of Russian- language and Hebrew sites. Most Hebrew sites allow users to respond to publications and to communicate with reporters by e-mail, and manage forums and readers' blogs. Some Hebrew sites also allow users to add information. As for Russian- language, most of them don't allow readers to respond or to communicate through forums, and none of the sites allow users to add in information.

4. The share of news related to Israelis greater in Hebrew sites than in Russian- language ones, however the difference may be defined as insignificant. Most of news published by Russian- language sites, as by Hebrew ones, is related to Israel, and local affairs have a higher priority even in the sites which are more internationally-oriented.

It seems that the main cause of the differences between the Russian- language and the Hebrew sites, especially in the criteria of coverage, currency and interactivity, is financial problems of Russian- language sites. Monetary constraints prevent investment in development and maintenance of the sites. However, supplementary research is required to point out the additional causes to differences highlighted by present study.

The research hypotheses were partly supported:

1. In accordance with the first hypothesis, Russian- language sites present less detailed and less current information than Hebrew sites, however closer examination of publications in both languages show that the main news reported by Hebrew sites are published in Russian- language sites as well, and response time to events is similar for sites in the two languages.

2. In accordance with the second hypothesis, the share of news related to Israel is lesser in Russian- language sites, and the share of news related to CIS and to the community of Russian immigrants in Israel is greater compared to Hebrew sites. Nevertheless, majority of the news published by Russian- language sites (as well as by Hebrew sites) are related to Israel, while news related to CIS constitute a small share of published news and news related to Russian immigrants' community in Israel constitute even smaller share.

Conclusions:

- A consumer of the Russian- language news will get relevant information about Israeli affairs, even if Israeli Russian- language news sites were his only source of information.
- News published by Israeli Russian- language news sites are focused on Israeli affairs and cover most of important issues published by Hebrew news sites. Therefore Russian- language news sites do not present an obstacle to integration of Russian immigrants in Israeli realities.

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