



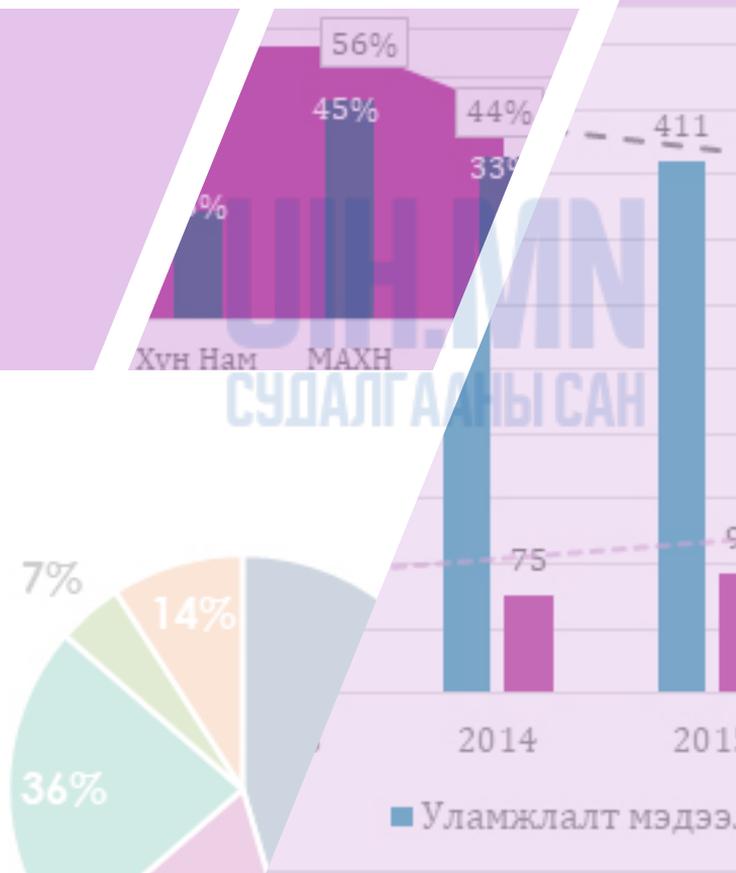
MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

LOCAL ELECTIONS OCTOBER 2020

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION JUNE 2021

- NEWSPAPERS
- TELEVISION
- SOCIAL MEDIA

ULAANBAATAR



The media monitoring captured in this report was conducted by the Press Institute of Mongolia under the Strengthening Women and Youth Engagement in the Electoral and Political Processes in Mongolia (SWYEEPPM) program implemented by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The findings and opinions expressed herein are those of the Press Institute of Mongolia and do not necessarily reflect the views of IRI or USAID.



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Abbreviations

DP	Democratic Party
FB	Facebook
KHUN	Khudalmuriin Undesni Nam (National Labor Party)
IRI	International Republican Institute
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
MNB	Mongolian National Broadcaster
MPP	Mongolian Peoples Party
MPRP	Mongolian Peoples Revolutionary Party
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SHINEN	Shudarga irgediin negdsen evsel nam (Coalition Party of Just Citizens)
SWYEPPM	Strengthening Women and Youth Engagement in the Electoral and Political Processes in Mongolia)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

FOREWORD

The flow of distorted and misleading information on social media has become a global problem. Recent research findings indicate a rising trend of disinformation, especially during elections, which is negatively affecting electoral processes and public trust in democracy¹.

Over the past few years, the emerging use of Facebook and Twitter as a major channel of information and communication has been drastically increasing, amplifying the number of rumors, distorted stories, and fake news being circulated in Mongolia's free and open information space.. To better understand the scope of disinformation in Mongolia, particularly around political campaigns and elections, the Press Institute of Mongolia monitored social and mainstream mass media during the October 2020 Local elections and June 2021 Presidential Election to monitor media's election coverage, and identify, document, and describe various types of disinformation. These media monitoring assessments were made possible by the support of the Strengthening Women and Youth Engagement in the Electoral and Political Processes in Mongolia (SWYEEPPM) program implemented by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The SWYEEPPM program focuses on fostering citizen engagement in Mongolia's pre-election period and supporting the Mongolian government's efforts to promote constituent-responsive governance and political accountability during the post-election period. This media monitoring project, as part of SWYEEPPM, supports the program's overall goals by assessing election campaign disinformation and facilitating awareness about the importance of ethical and objective election coverage and integrity of Mongolia's pre and post-election political discourse.

¹Examples of relevant research include: Freedom on the net 2018. Freedom house, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/manipulating-social-media-undermine-democracy>; Samantha Bradshaw, Philip N. Howard (2020) "2019 Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation" University of Oxford, <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroopReport19.pdf> N.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The monitoring findings indicate that news coverage, on both social and mass media, insufficiently fulfilled the role of informing and educating citizens about electoral processes and woefully fell short of protecting the integrity of public political discourse. Election-related content disseminated by online and traditional media focused primarily on short news bits briefly informing about events and processes, while the share of analytical stories was marginal, with voter education content comprising around only five percent of coverage. The news media displayed high vulnerability to political exploitation by producing and disseminating content to intentionally discredit candidates, parties, or authorities, providing overly positive coverage of the ruling party, promoting the narrow political interests of the media owner, and frequently circulating concealed advertisements. Especially in the case of broadcast television, including the National Public Service Broadcaster, the media monitoring found a high degree of political influence. For example, seventy-five percent of election-related news items broadcasted on the two monitored nationally syndicated televisions' prime time news programs during the 2020 Local Elections constituted political advertisement, out of which 97 percent was concealed advertisement presented in the format of objective journalistic news stories.

Facebook pages and public groups administered by individuals or organizations and targeting specific social groups and communities (for example, residents of certain provinces, soums, districts, etc. or supporters of certain political groups, coalitions, etc.) played a major role in circulating election-related information and shaping public discourse around the election campaigns. The majority of election-related content disseminated by these groups and pages (i.e. 75% during the Local Elections and 80% during the Presidential Election) constituted hidden propaganda or incomplete and distorted information. Also, worth mentioning is that such patterns of information manipulation and political influence of the news media remained identical during the Local and the Presidential elections, despite some differences in the narrative content and types of information.

Among the election coverage social media posts grouped in the category of “Disinformation,” negative posts to discredit candidates, parties, or the government took the most significant share (i.e. 56 % during the local election and 63 % during the Presidential Election). These negative messages enjoyed the greatest audience engagement (up to 3,000 likes/shares/comments during the Presidential Election and 6,000 during the Local Elections). The popular Facebook pages and groups tended to pick and spread specifically harmful content originating from online news media and escalated their dissemination and meanings by adding emotionally charged comments and explanations. Furthermore, the monitoring team identified both during the Local and the Presidential elections the presence of designated pages ‘specializing’ in political memes (using a combination of images, pictures, and texts to convey specific messages) and fabricated video posts to diminish and discredit candidates or parties (e.g., Khatuu medee). In contrast to the predominantly positive coverage of the ruling Mongolian People’s Party (MPP), in the mainstream media, political memes disseminated during the Presidential Election on Facebook primarily targeted the MPP candidate, U.Khurelsukh, mocking and scorning his campaign messages and promises.

Even though the monitoring findings disclosed disturbing shortcomings in the news reporting of election campaigns and identified severe risks to the integrity of public discourse and information space in Mongolia, the research team does not recommend restrictive legal measures against the increasing prevalence of disinformation to avoid undue interferences and potential unintended negative consequences with freedom of speech and expression. Therefore, the policy recommendations proposed by the Press Institute based on the monitoring findings suggest more proactive measures to address key vulnerabilities by empowering citizen to guard against disinformation through stronger media and information literacy and awareness-raising of the negative consequences of the distorted free and open information space. Along with this, efforts need to be made to promote higher-quality, ethical and objective journalism, and such research assessing disinformation needs to be sustained and expanded in order to provide a comprehensive response to the troubling phenomenon of disinformation and poor election campaign news coverage.

2. MONITORING METHODOLOGY

The Press Institute’s research team consisting of 6 research specialists, developed the media monitoring methodology, including the sampling, data retrieval methods, and quantitative and qualitative criteria for analyzing the retrieved items as described below. In view of the novelty of the monitoring project and its research methodology, as well as considering the importance of strengthening the engagement of non-state actors in the fight against disinformation, the Press Institute trained a group of 12 civil society activists and journalists on the monitoring methodology. Five of the trained observers joined the research team of the Press Institute to monitor the television, print, and online news media and social media network content during the campaign periods of Mongolia’s October 2020 Local Elections and June 2021 Presidential Election.

2.1 Social media monitoring

The research team used the same methodology for monitoring both elections’ media coverage.

The data set for analyzing the social media content was created using proprietary software to gather election-related information disseminated by the following channels during the official campaigns for the Local Elections (September 30 - October 13, 2020) and Presidential Election (May 24 – June 7, 2021) covering the:

- Top 12 relevant Facebook pages with the highest number of followers (including three online news media pages—ikon.mn, zarig.mn, tovch. Mn and excluding personal and commercial entity pages. For the list of monitored Facebook pages and groups, please see Annex 1).
- Top 11 Facebook social groups with the highest number of members (including groups of five provinces from Mongolia’s four economic regions).

Out of a total of 2,500 election-related items disseminated during the Local Elections campaign period, the research team selected 1,000 units with the highest audience reach for analysis (from September, 30 to October 15, 2020). In the case of the Presidential Election, out of 2,000 units of content disseminated through the channels included in the sample, 800 items with the highest audience reach directly related to the elections were selected and analyzed.

Units of analysis:

A “unit of analysis” is an uninterrupted portion of posted/published/broadcasted content dealing with the same subject matter. Visuals, texts, combinations of text, videos, graphics that make a direct or indirect reference to the candidates, or the parties or coalitions participating in the elections, or any issue or event related to the elections and the platforms of contending political groupings constitute the “unit of analysis.”

Criteria for data analysis:

A “unit of analysis” is an uninterrupted portion of posted/published/broadcasted content dealing with the same subject matter. Visuals, texts, combinations of text, videos, graphics that make a direct or indirect reference to the candidates, or the parties or coalitions participating in the elections, or any issue or event related to the elections and the platforms of contending political groupings constitute the “unit of analysis.”

Message

- Format (e.g., visual, text, audio)
- Main content of the message (party/candidate’s actions (failures, achievements), candidate’s personality and private matters, candidate’s policies, promises, candidates’ relationships & networks, voter education, voter actions/reactions towards party/candidate, campaign strategies, political statements, etc.)
- If a reference to candidates/parties: name of the candidate the message refers to, political affiliation, gender
- Positive, negative, or neutral references to target actors/parties
- Purpose: This is broken out into several sub-categories such as voter education, objective information, monetary gain, personal gain, discredit candidates/parties, trigger negative emotions to polarize audiences, damage government reputation/public trust, influence policy/decision making.
Type of Message (a journalistic news item, paid for political advertisement, personal statement/opinion, Disinformation (Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization, or country), Misinformation (Information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm), Mal-information (Information that is based on reality but used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organization, or country).
- Audience targeted by the message through keywords, style, direct reference, images, etc. (political affiliates, social groups (men, women, youth, adolescents, entire society)

Actor/ Source

- Type of actor/source disseminating the message (e.g., media, government, business, individual, NGO, citizen group, political group, political party, anonymous, etc.)
- Techniques, strategies, arguments used to achieve impact (misleading title, card stalking, false facts or visuals, exaggeration, over-generalization, narrative laundering, changing the quotation, source or context, loaded words or metaphors, ridiculing, discrediting, conspiracy theories – for the definition of the techniques, please see Annex 4)
- Dissemination/automation (human, human network, cyborg, bot, bot-net, sponsored)

Impact/Audience

- Reaction (predominantly positive, predominantly negative, relatively balanced)
- Reach and level of engagement: Total number of likes, shares, comments

2.2 Monitoring methodology of newspapers and televisions

The sample of monitored newspapers and television content included the following:

Table 1. Monitoring sample (Newspapers and Television content)

Election campaign period	Monitored media outlets	Number of issues monitored
Local Elections: 09.30.2020 - 10.13.2020	Daily newspapers: • Unuudur • Ugluunii sonin	29
	Local newspapers: • Arkhangain amidral • Khentiin medee • Zavkhan	
	Television: • MNB • TV9	30 issues of prime-time news programs

Presidential Election: 05.24.2021 - 06.07.2021	Daily newspapers: • Unuudur • Ugluunii sonin	20
	Television: • MNB • TV9	18 issues of prime-time news programs

Table 2. Number of monitored research units (election-related items) in newspapers issues

№	Monitored outlet title	Number of units analyzed	
		Local Elections (09.30 - 10.13.2020)	Presidential Election (5.24 - 6.7.2021)
	Newspaper title		
1	Ugluunii sonin	23	7
2	Unuudur	19	15
3	Arkhangain amidral	8	--
4	Zavkhan	7	--
5	Khentiin medee	10	--
	Total: units analyzed in newspapers	67	22

Table 3. Number of monitored research units (election-related items) in television news programs

№	Monitored outlet title	Number of units analyzed	
		Local Elections (09.30 - 10.13.2020)	Presidential Election (5.24 - 6.7.2021)
1	MNB	32	34
2	TV9	53	98
	Total: units analyzed in TV	85	132

The sample of print newspapers was selected due to their distribution areas (national and local newspapers), high circulation number (for national newspapers), regularity and frequency of publication (local newspapers), and differences in editorial policies (Unuudur – broadsheet paper employing a traditional approach to news gathering and a neutral writing tone, Ugluunii sonin – tabloid-style paper focusing on short stories with catchy (sensational) titles). Concerning television, two national television stations were selected due to their having the highest audience ratings and differences in their ownership/affiliations, which result in differences in editorial policies (MNB – a public service broadcaster with strong political influence by the governing party, TV9 – private television owned and directly influenced by the former MPRP leader, which has since merged with the ruling MPP).

Criteria for data analysis

Within the framework of the newspaper and television monitoring component, PIM compiled quantitative and qualitative information according to the following criteria.

Quantitative criterion:

- Share of news items dedicated to election candidates, political parties, and topics in the total editorial content
- Frequency of stories regarding female election candidates
- Use of terms identifying female election candidates
- The size, theme, frequency, balance, and diversity of voter education information
- Degree (type, size, frequency) of implicit advertising by different political actors

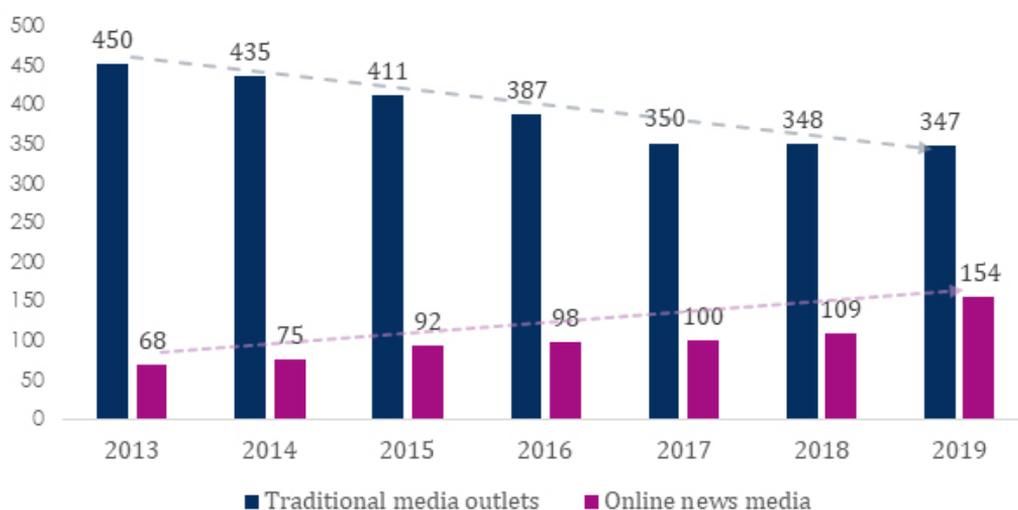
Qualitative criterion (in print and electronic media):

- Positive, negative, or neutral references to actors
- Bias in news items dedicated to election candidates, political parties, and topics (number and type of information sources, use of opinions, and stereotypes)
- Number and content of analytical media product with particular emphasis on analysis and evaluation.

3. OVERVIEW OF MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN MONGOLIA

Mongolians enjoy a great variety of choices for media content. According to the annual Media report produced by the Press Institute², as of January 2020, there were about 500 media outlets, including nine national daily newspapers, 20 national broadcasters, 120 local televisions, about 50 radio stations, and 150 online news websites. The number of offline media outlets, especially print media, has been steadily decreasing since 2013, while the number of online news media keeps increasing.

Chart 1. Number of media outlets 2013 - 2019



However, the availability of a multitude of media choices does not necessarily translate into a plurality of information and viewpoints because the media market is penetrated by political affiliations. According to the media ownership monitoring study conducted by the Press Institute and the Reporters Without Borders³, 74% of mainstream media outlets in Mongolia have direct political affiliations through their founders and/or owners. Legal regulations to ensure transparency of media ownership are deficient, and citizens have little knowledge about the media ownership structures and their impact on the integrity of the country's free and open information space.

²Mongolian Media Today 2020. Press Institute of Mongolia

³Who owns the media in Mongolia? Press Institute, Reporters without borders. 2016. <http://mongolia.mom-rsf.org/en/>

Traditional media outlets (particularly television) remain popular among people 50 years and older. With the increasing Internet penetration (78,2% as of December 2020)⁴, social media platforms, especially Facebook, are becoming one of the most popular channels for communication and access to information among younger generations. According to the Press Institute's annual audience research findings, an average of 90 percent of people under the age of 50 use Facebook as their primary source of information⁵. Following the changing media preferences, the traditional news media (print, television, and radio) increasingly use Facebook to promote and disseminate their content. As of January 2020, 74% of all media outlets operating in Mongolia, including the online news media, had their own Facebook pages. However, the majority of Facebook users do not distinguish the different sources of information found on Facebook. A study⁶ among 500 people ages 18 – 40 conducted by the Press Institute in 2020 with the assistance of IRI revealed that young people tend to trust the information disseminated on Facebook because they lack the knowledge and skills to evaluate the variety of information. Even though about 60 percent of surveyed people rated themselves as capable of critically using media, about the same percentage of people lack skills to identify harmful content, for example, hate speech or discriminatory messages, and more than half of information users (57%) do not distinguish between biased and objective information.



⁴Annual statistical data on the Internet use worldwide. <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#mn>

⁵Media audience research report. Press Institute. 2020

⁶Communication behaviors and media and information literacy of young people in Mongolia. Nationwide survey among 500 people ages 18 – 40 years. Press Institute. International Reproduction Institute.

4. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

4.1 Social media

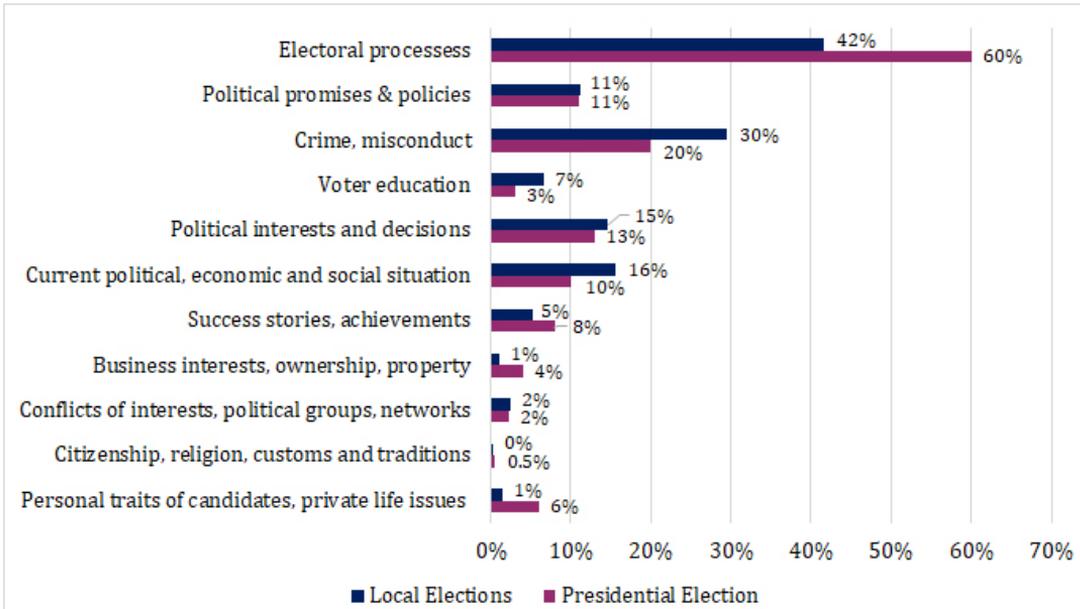
4.1.1 Journalistic content on Facebook

Journalism has to play an essential role in protecting the integrity of the public sphere through the provision of high-quality information independently from the type of channel being used. In order to assess how well the media fulfilled this function during recent election periods, the monitoring team assessed the content of online news media disseminated on Facebook separately from the election-related messages communicated through other (citizen) groups and pages. This section highlights the main features of the election-related information circulated through the most popular online news websites' Facebook pages.

Information on the electoral processes took the highest share of campaign coverage

Both during the Local and the Presidential elections, the news content on generic electoral processes took the highest share among the election-related information on online news media. Educating voters on the importance of electoral participation explaining the election systems and processes enjoyed little prominence during both elections, with voter education content making up (3% during the Presidential Election, 7% during the Local Elections). The Presidential Election coverage distinguished itself through a stronger focus on electoral processes and personal traits, and personal life issues of the candidates, while the crimes and misconduct related to candidates were the second most popular topic during the Local Elections campaign. For further information on the types of news and information content disseminated via Facebook, please see Chart 2 below.

Chart 2. Content of information disseminated by online news media via Facebook (during the Local Elections 2020 and Presidential election 2021)

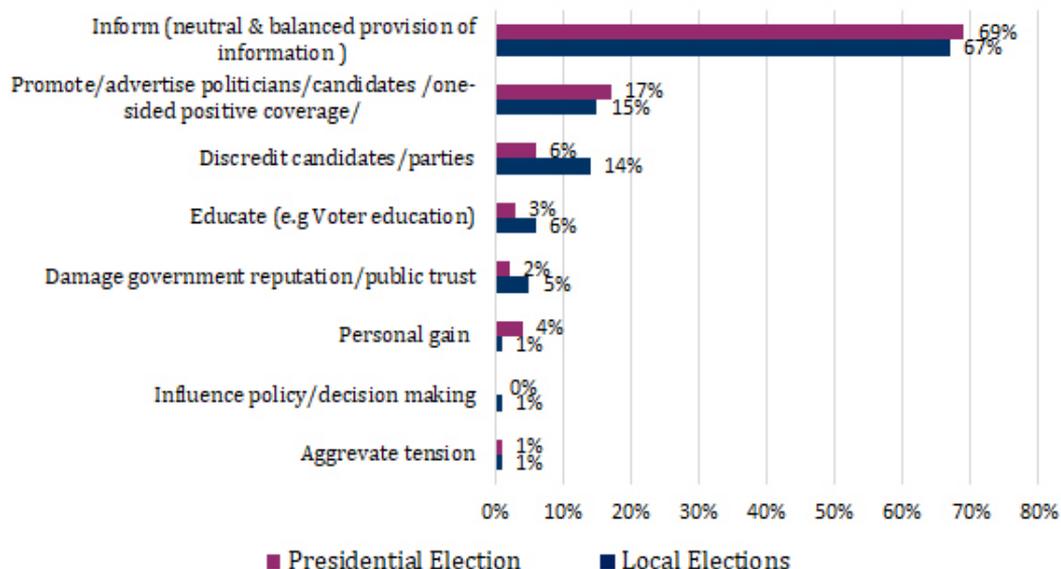


Along with the dominating share of information concerning electoral processes, issues of public concern at the time of the election remained at the center of the campaign both during the Local and Presidential elections. During the Local Elections, words such as “traffic jams,” “election attendance,” “black car hacking,” “money distribution,” “crime,” and “trial” represented the most frequently used keywords used by online news media during the Local Elections campaign, while “COVID19” and ‘white ballot’ were by far the most popular words appearing in election-related information during the Presidential Election, indicating a high percentage of content on these topics.

Online news media remain vulnerable to political manipulation

During both the Presidential and Local elections, most election-related content disseminated by online news media (an average of 70%) served the purpose of responsibly informing the public. However, the remaining share of about 30% constituted distorted information aimed at manipulating public opinion for political or personal gain (e.g., through discrediting candidates/parties, damaging reputations, influencing policy/decision making, etc.)

Chart 3. Purpose of information disseminated by online news media on Facebook during the 2020 Local Elections and 2021 Presidential Election)



For examples of distorted information, please see Annex 2 (Case examples of misleading content)

Positive information on the ruling party dominated coverage

In contents directly referring to political parties, the ruling MPP was mentioned most often (65%) during the Local Elections, followed by the Democratic Party (DP, 48%). As for the Presidential Election, the on-line news media devoted a relatively equal share of attention to the parties nominating their candidates for the Presidency.

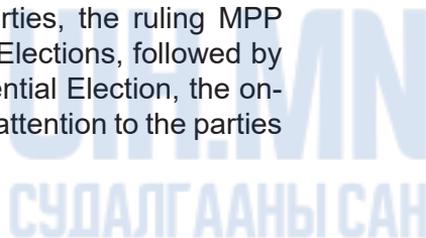
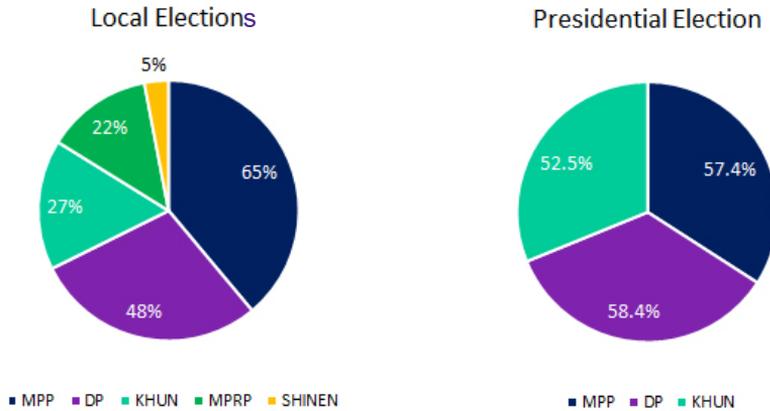
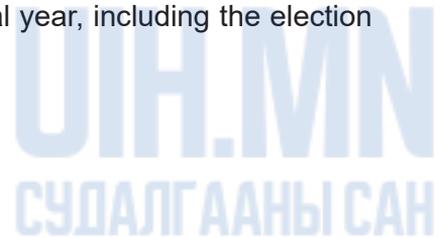


Chart 4. Content with direct reference to political party names

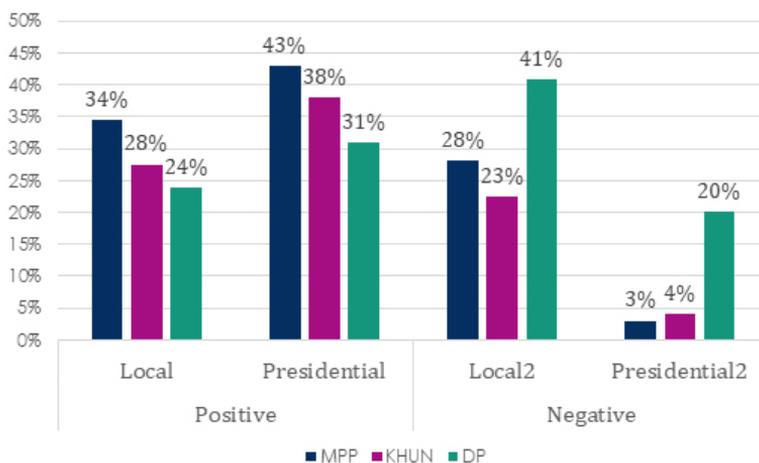


Concerning the share of positive coverage, both during the Local and Presidential elections, online news media favored the MPP by providing more positive information (34% during the Local and 43% during the Presidential Election). The DP received the least positive coverage and the highest share of negative mentions during both elections. The high share of positive content about the MPP may indicate news media being vulnerable to political manipulation. The research team suggests that the majority party running the government has the power to allocate the government advertisement funds, through which those in power may exercise influence over the media content. This influence may, for example, be secured through ‘collaboration’ contracts commonly concluded between government institutions and media organizations to ensure that the respective media outlet regularly (and positively) covers the relevant agency/official actions during the entire fiscal year, including the election year⁷.



⁷Examples of collaboration contracts between media and government organizations can be found under the following links: <http://www.prokuror.mn/blog/ME/3650>; <https://www.bgd.mn/blog.php?p=3704>; https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjYpJjumY_wAh-Wafd4KHdv0Da4QFjABegQIAhAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fshilendans.gov.mn%2Fpdfview%3Ffile%3D-342b48f60a0265a7707efb7bbeac2dd0.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3GK7vdTbwjDOHJN5eyVtmд https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjEpvDXmo_wAhUYfd-4KHSI7gQFjAOegQIJhAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.shilendans.gov.mn%2Fpdfview%3Ffile%3D776db-c040a0265a3799231b72e9c95f0.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3KSE7XopONXecpM0D283_U

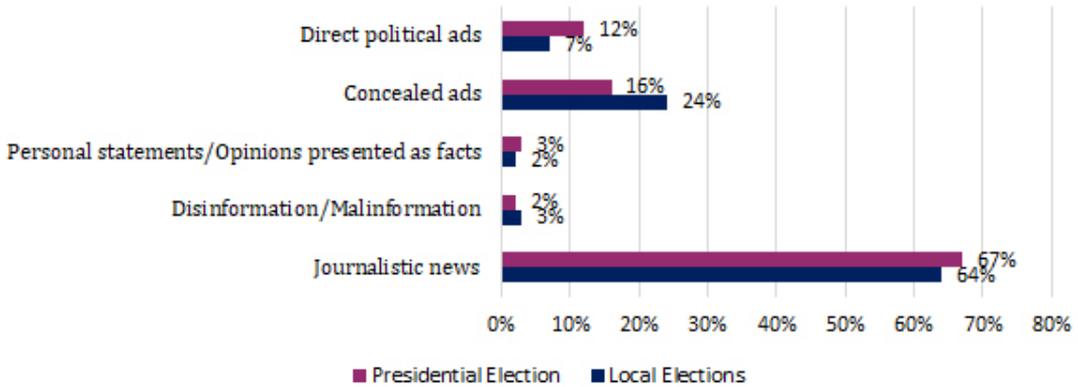
Chart 5. Tendency/tone of content directly referring to political parties



Misleading content on online news media accounted for an average of 25% of election campaign coverage

Article 38.4 of the Law on the Elections of Capital City, Aimag, Soum and District Hurals of Citizen Representatives and Article 34.4 of the Law on the Election of the President of Mongolia says that all election advertisement materials need to clearly and visibly indicate the source of the advertisement or the name of the candidate/party whom the content is being advertised. Articles 47.10 and 43.8 of the same laws respectively prohibit candidates from appearing on independent programs, interviews, and other editorial content (apart from direct advertisements) during the election campaign and until the end of Election Day. The Criminal code of Mongolia, Article 14.8, also prohibits disseminating “false information in various forms” and content that deliberately slanders, insults, or defames others. However, these provisions have been continuously violated - the share of misleading content, including concealed ads, opinions presented as facts, or deliberately created false information accounted for 21% of coverage during the Presidential Election in June 2021 and 29% during the Local Elections in October 2020.

Chart 6. Information types (during the 2020 Local Elections and 2021 Presidential Election)



Concealed political advertisements disseminated during the 2020 Local Elections included, for example, stories such as the one covering the President of Mongolia Battulga Khaltma’s visit to Umnugobi province. This content was presented on the Facebook page of the online news website Zarig.mn, as a journalistic news item, focuses on the speech of Mr. Enkhmunkh Batjargal, a citizen from the eighth bagh in the Tsagaan bu-lag area of Umnugobi province, during the meeting of the President with province citizens. In his speech, Mr. Enkhmunkh, under the applause of meeting participants, emotionally describes the harsh living conditions of citizens in his bagh. The story does not cover the details of the President’s visit; it also does not mention that Mr. Enkhmunkh was a Local elections candidate from Umnugobi province, but only presents Mr. Enkhmunkh as a passionate citizen who loves his homeland. At the end of the story, Mr. Enkhmunkh is shown with the President of Mongolia shaking hands and showing around the area.

Image 1. Example of concealed political advertisement disseminated by online news media during the local elections via Facebook



Male candidates dominated election coverage in online news media on Facebook

During the Local Elections campaign, the election-related content in online news media demonstrated a serious lack of gender balance. Even though the share of female candidates in Local Elections comprised 32 percent of all candidates, the share of content referring to female candidates took only three percent, while 57 percent covered male-only candidates and 40 percent referred to groups of male and female candidates. As for the Presidential Election campaign, all three candidates were male, and the share of election-related content referring to female politicians was, similarly to the Local election, three percent.

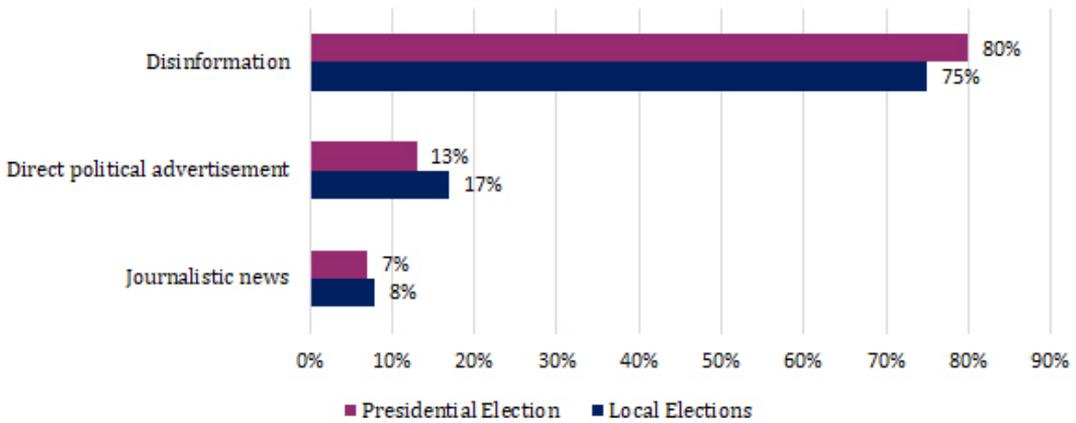
4.1.2 Content and features of election-related information on social media

Facebook pages and public groups administered by individuals or organizations and targeting specific social groups and communities (for example, residents of certain provinces, soums, districts, etc. or supporters of certain political groups, coalitions, etc.) played a significant role in circulating election-related information and shaping the public discourse around the campaigns. The following section characterizes the main features of content disseminated through the monitored Facebook groups and pages with the highest number of followers (excluding commercial/business pages).

Distorted information, propaganda, and personal opinions dominated the election-related discourse on social media.

Only an average of 15% of Facebook content directly or indirectly referring to the election, electoral processes, candidates, and/or parties represented constituted recognizable direct political advertisements with appropriate names and logos of political parties or candidates, and 7.5% was journalistic news circulated by various Facebook users.

Chart 7. Election-related information on Facebook

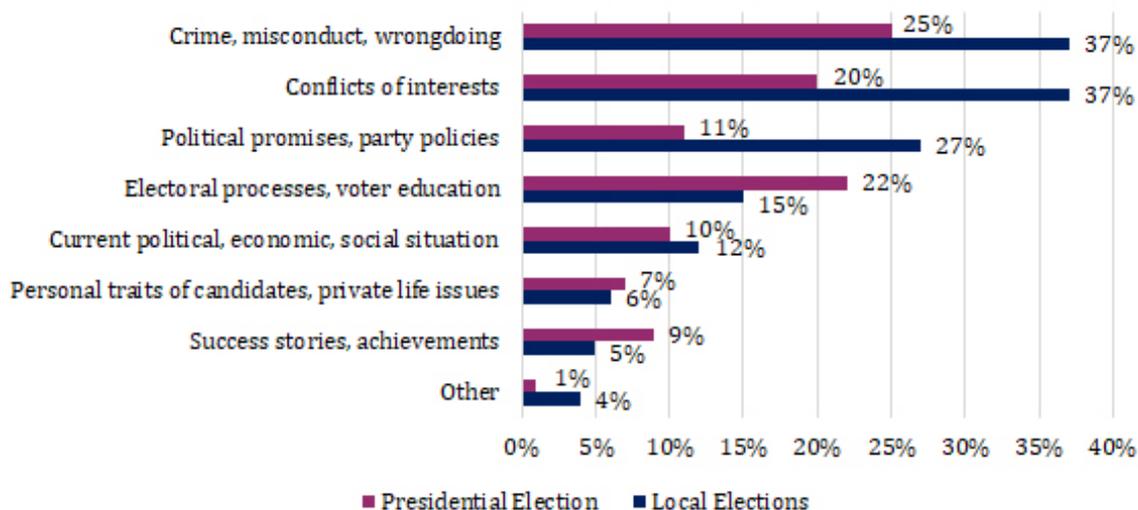


The dominating majority of the election-related content disseminated on Facebook by the most popular groups and pages (i.e. 75% during the Local Elections and 80 % during the Presidential Election) constituted hidden propaganda or incomplete and distorted information. The misleading information included provocative accusations to discredit the reputation of candidates, create distrust towards parties and coalitions, or statements aimed at glorifying politicians.

For case examples of misleading content (Disinformation), please see Annex 2

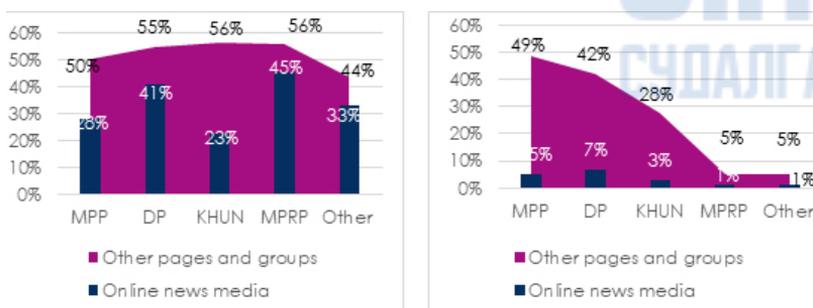
During the Local Elections campaign, more than 70% of content shared and discussed on Facebook raised conflicts of interest or alleged wrongdoings of candidates on the agenda without presenting verifiable facts or sources. Meanwhile, voter education information on social media was much less prominent (15%). Most posts referring to political promises, party policies, or issues and problems in society and were emotionally charged to favor or discredit one or another party or candidate. The Presidential campaign-related content on Facebook was less negative and more informative than Local Elections coverage, with about 45% of items raising issues about suggested wrongdoings or conflicts of interests of candidates and 22% of items about the electoral processes.

Chart 8. Main contents of Facebook pages and groups (during the Presidential and Local elections)



Among the posts on Facebook grouped in the category of “Dis-information,” negative posts to discredit candidates or parties took the most significant share (63% during the Local Elections and 43% during the Presidential Election). These negative messages enjoyed the greatest reach among the monitored content. The Facebook pages and groups tended to pick and spread specifically the negative content originating from online news media and escalate their dissemination and meaning by adding emotionally charged comments and explanations.

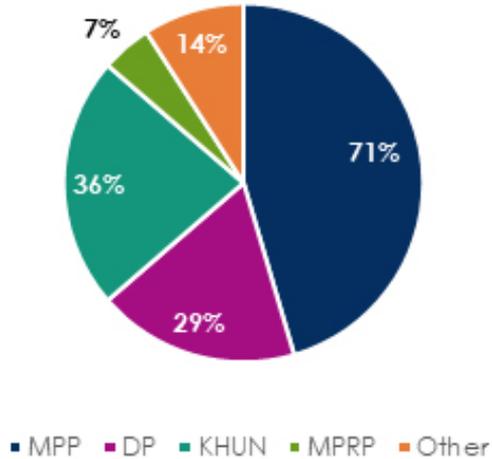
Chart 9. Negative news content referring to party names shared from online news media by other groups and pages



9.1 Local Elections

9.2 Presidential Election

**Chart 10. Reference to political parties in political memes
(Presidential election 2021)**



The monitoring findings identified an emerging trend of creating and disseminating political memes by deliberately combining images, pictures, and textual explanations to convey specific information and meanings in a light, amusing, sarcastic, exaggerated, or disturbing way. During the 2020 Local Elections campaign, memes accounted for a relatively small share of 7% of the total election-related content. However, using political memes increased during the Presidential Election, accounting for 11% of all election-related content. The majority of such memes referred to the MPP, specifically, the presidential candidate U.Khurelsukh, mocking and scorning his campaign messages or promises or blaming him for economic or social policy failures.

During both the Local and Presidential elections, there were designated pages 'specializing' in political memes and fabricated video posts to diminish and discredit candidates or parties. For example, the page Khatuu medee disseminated ten election-related posts during the 14 days of the Local Elections campaign, half of which were produced in the format of memes, and the other half represented professionally edited videos. 90% of the content on this page were negative items serving the purpose of ridiculing or discrediting various parties and candidates. The same page posted eight election-related memes during the Presidential Election campaign, all of which negatively referred to the MPP candidate.

Image 2. Example of political meme



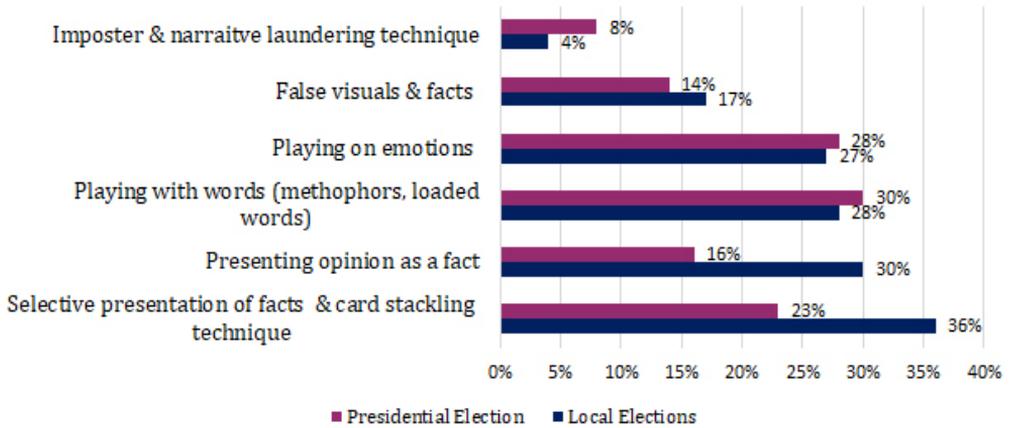
Image 3. Examples of Memes on Khatuu medee page



Common techniques of information manipulation

The research team identified seven types of techniques commonly used to fabricate misleading content and manipulate public discourse during both elections. Selective presentation of facts (partially true statements or “card stalking”) was the most popular strategy during the Local Elections while playing with metaphors and loaded words was the most common technique during the Presidential Election. (For more detail on the definitions of techniques, please see Annex 4)

Chart 11. Common techniques used for information manipulation

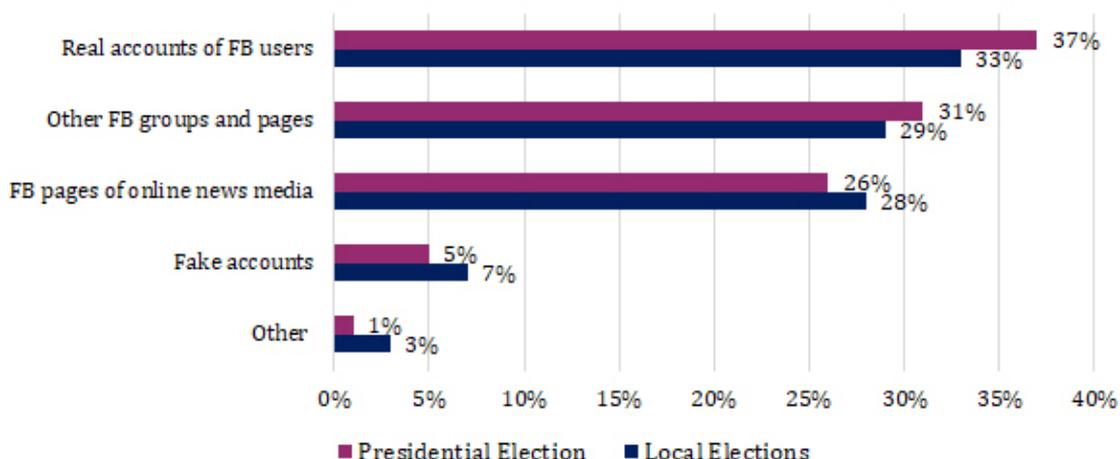


4.1.3 Sources of election-related content on Facebook

During the Local and Presidential elections, most of the election-related Facebook posts originated from individual user accounts with real names or pseudonyms. The content disseminated by popular public groups and pages took the second-biggest share. These are public pages and groups with the number of members between 20,000-6000,000 (e.g., Oluulaa 147,000 members, Mongoloo 407,000 members, Aarkhal 625,000 members) mostly set up 2-6 years ago, and renamed 2-8 times. They disseminated the vast majority (an average of 79% during the two elections) of misleading, malicious, and fraudulent information related to the elections.

Even though the online news media represented the third most popular source of election-related content, the average reach per post disseminated by online news media was highest compared to posts originating from other pages, groups, and accounts. For example, during the Local Elections, an average of 600 people responded to a post disseminated through the online media's Facebook page, while the average number of audience engagement on other groups and pages was 79, which is 7.5 times less compared to the audience engagement on online news media's Facebook pages. Also, during the Presidential Election, the same amount of content distributed through online media reached seven times more people than content distributed through other groups and pages.

Chart 12. Types of election-related message sources on Facebook



24% of all misleading content during the Local Elections and 34% during the Presidential Election campaign were disseminated by other groups and pages in an organized manner. This means false and misleading content was disseminated by one or several connected accounts to multiple sites and groups simultaneously.

Of the information disseminated to others from both primary and secondary sources, the content distributed in video format received the most emotional responses (emojis) and impressions. For example, during the Presidential Election, about 43 percent of such posts were overwhelmingly supportive, making the content appear to be widely supported in society.

4.1.4 Discussion of popular Facebook content on Twitter

During the Local Elections campaign, the research team analyzed how the most popular election-related Facebook content was discussed on Twitter, using keyword queries through the advanced Twitter search platform. Meanwhile, during the Presidential Election campaign, the Twitter analysis was expanded by additional tools such as Tweetbeaver, Twlets, and Excel merger. To this end, a total of 27,230 tweets were downloaded and categorized to identify disinformation trends on Twitter. Of these, 16,906 were retweets. Twenty-three percent of all tweets were photos, 4.5 percent were videos, 0.5 percent were images (gifs), and the remaining 72 percent were texts.

The following trends were observed in the election-related information posted on Twitter during the Presidential and Local elections:

1. The dissemination of incomplete, distorted, obscene, provocative, and false information, which was used to undermine the reputation and credibility of others deliberately, was relatively limited on Twitter, compared to organized, wide dissemination on Facebook. One out of every three items classified as disinformation on Facebook was widely discussed on Twitter, but the contents reflected the opinions of 'real' tweeters rather than an organized disinformation activity.

2. The tone of the election-related news on Facebook was not always the same as the tone of the discussion on Twitter. In other words, the conversations on Facebook and Twitter each had their own color and attitude. For example, during the Presidential Election, Facebook was dominated by positive content about the Mongolian People's Party and its candidate (43% MPP compared to 30% DP), while on Twitter, the same party was criticized and ridiculed by more than 70 percent of all MPP-related tweets. On the other hand, during the Local Elections, negative information about E. Batshugar, the MPP's candidate, was most popular on Facebook, and this trend was the same on Twitter.

3. One of the common strategies to disseminate false information on Facebook was placing the content on the most popular Facebook pages (mostly online news media pages) and increasing the spread through popular public groups and real Facebook users with many followers. This strategy was observed on Twitter too. Examples included a fake video message claiming that former President Elbegdorj was behind D. Enkhbat, the Khun party's candidate, which was distributed to more than 5,000 people via the Facebook page Aarkhal. After that, former MP L. Gundalai quoted the above information in his tweet, in addition to whom further Twitter users with 10-37 followers retweeted the message.

Image 4. Example of candidate related content disseminated on Twitter during the Local elections



Image 5. Example of candidate related content disseminated on Twitter during the Presidential Election



Image 6. Examples of Facebook content disseminated by popular Twitter accounts



4.2. Traditional media and election information

Traditional media in terms of offline news media such as printed newspapers and televisions are considered to play the leading role in protecting the integrity of electoral coverage by providing high-quality information and promoting the democratic discourse in society. In this regard, the monitoring team assessed the content of election-related information disseminated by two national newspapers (Unuudur and Ugluunii sonin) and two major nationwide broadcasters (MNB and TV9). The monitoring during the Local Elections campaign period included, in addition to the above-mentioned media three local newspapers (Arkhangain amidral, Khentiin medee, Zavkhan). (For information on the Terms and Definitions used for the monitoring please see Annex 3).

4.2.1 Newspapers

Print newspapers tend to lose their prominence with each election cycle. During both the Local and Presidential elections, the monitored newspapers published one to two election-related news items per issue. 25% of these items published during the Local election campaign were political advertisements, of which 45% were concealed ads guised in the format of journalistic stories. The high percentage of hidden advertisements during the Local Elections campaign indicates that similar to the online news media, national daily and local newspapers remained highly vulnerable to political exploitation by candidates and parties. However, the Presidential Election coverage looked completely different.

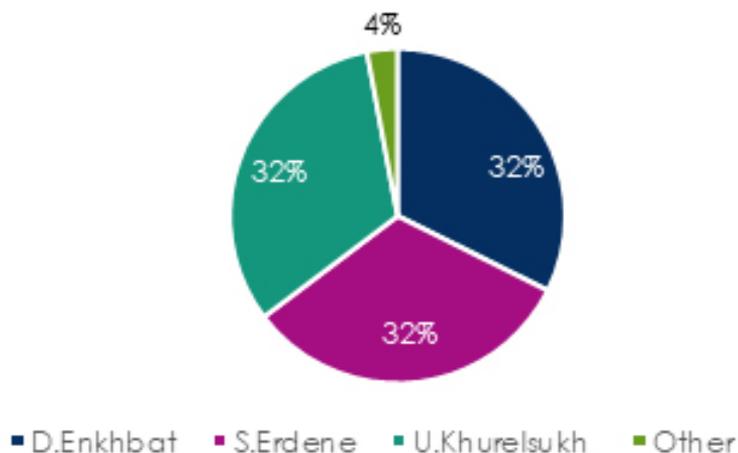
Table 4. Types of election-related content in newspapers

№	Type of election-related content	Local Elections		Presidential Election
1	Election advertisement (direct and implicit)	25%	Of which: 55% direct ad 45% concealed ad	0%
2	Journalistic news coverage	75%		100%

The candidates running for President seem to have refused to use the printed media for campaigning purposes – neither direct nor concealed advertisement was identified in the monitored newspapers during the en-

tire campaign period. If during the Local Elections half of the concealed advertisement prepared in the journalistic format had mentioned the DP, the absence of political exploitation of print media during the Presidential Election positively influenced the election coverage - both analyzed newspapers demonstrated balanced and neutral reporting about all three candidates running for President.

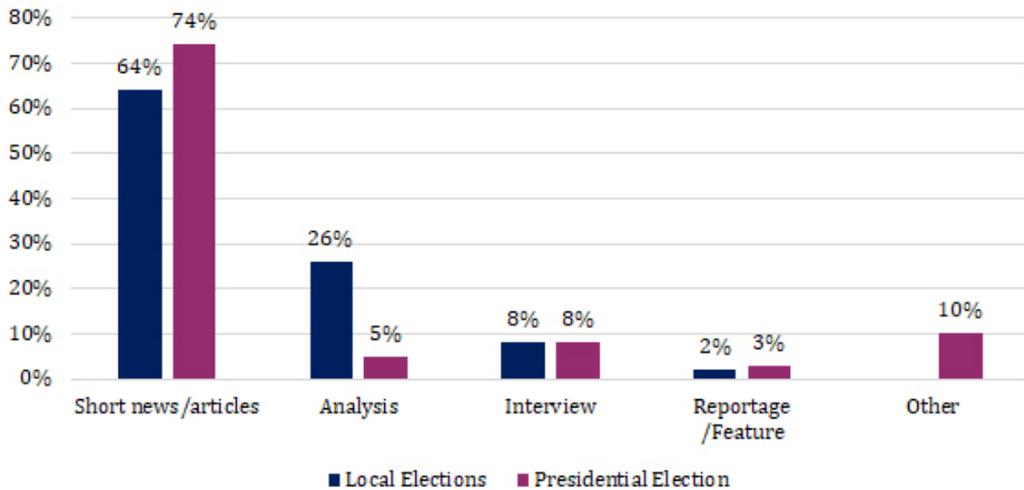
Chart 13. Share of stories covering the Presidential candidates



Brief news pieces lacking in-depth coverage was the most widely used format of electoral journalism in print media

64% of the election-related items published in newspapers during the 2020 Local Elections and 74% of content published during the Presidential Election campaign period were short news stories and articles briefly informing about current events without elaborating on details. In other words, during the election, the media did not adequately fulfill its role to assist voters in making choices by providing in-depth objective analyses of the promises of the candidates or explanations on the processes and issues related to the election. Compared to the Local Elections 2020, in-depth analytical stories providing background information and/or explanation were rare during the Presidential Election. vs. 5%).

Chart 14. Types of election-related journalistic content _newspapers



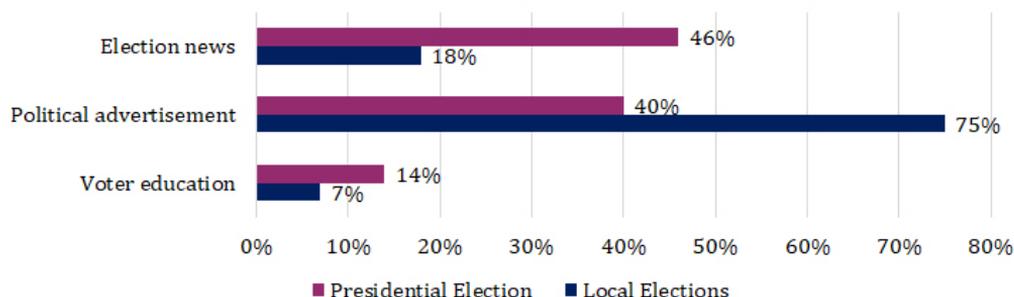
The Presidential Election coverage also distinguished itself by excluding dedicated columns covering the social media trends and posts., while during the Local Elections campaign, 9% of election-related items covered in print quoted posts from Twitter or Facebook).

4.2.2 Television

National TV broadcasters displayed the highest level of vulnerability to political exploitation among all monitored media outlets. Political influence on news reporting was especially high during the Local Elections campaign period. Seventy-five percent of election-related news items broadcast on the two monitored nationally syndicated televisions' prime time news programs represented political advertisement during the October Local Elections. Out of these Local Elections political advertisement content, 97% was concealed advertisement presented in the format of journalistic news stories (which is prohibited by law).

Election coverage during the Presidential campaign 2021 was slightly better in terms of independence and professionalism, with more (46%) journalistic news stories and voter education content (14%) and less political advertisement (40%) as compared to the Local Elections coverage.

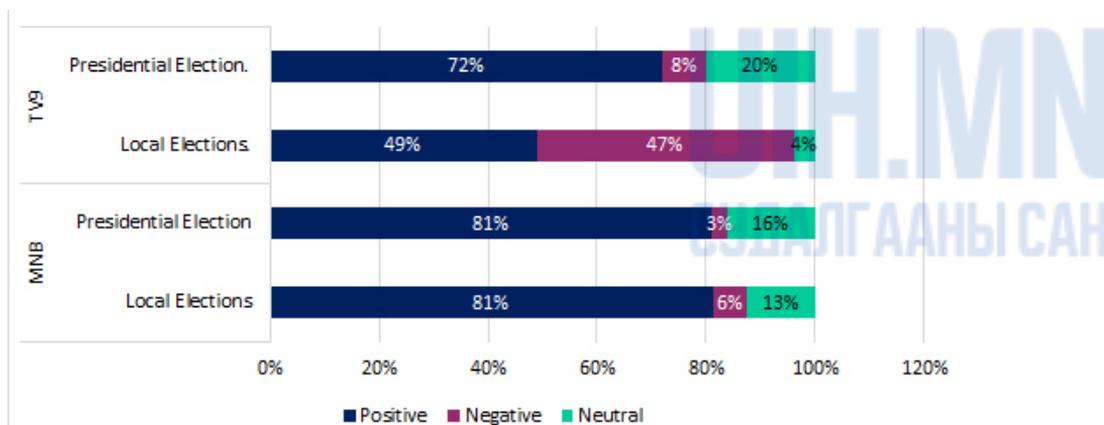
Chart 15. Types of election related TV content



Among the election news items, neutral depictions of events and issues were relatively rare. The National Public service broadcaster (MNB) was overwhelmingly positive in its news presentation both during the Local and Presidential Election campaigns.

Compared to the Local Elections campaign, the share of negative coverage on the private national television TV9 was significantly smaller during the Presidential Election (8% vs. 47%). This might be related to the reunification of the MPRP (whose leader owns this television station) with the MPP just before the Presidential Election. In fact, the increased share of positive stories on TV9 during the Presidential Election was predominantly related to the MPP candidate.

Chart 16. The tone of news coverage



5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMBAT THE SPREAD OF DISINFORMATION

The monitoring of election coverage and information during the 2020 Local Elections campaign and 2021 Presidential Election reveals widespread proliferation of online and offline disinformation in Mongolia.

The news media displayed high vulnerability to political exploitation, and public discourse on popular Facebook groups and pages is dominated by distorted information, propaganda, and personal opinions presented or used as facts. The prevalence of information manipulation poses significant risks to the integrity of election coverage and campaign public discourse in Mongolia and ultimately undermines public trust in democratic processes. This situation demands for key stakeholders, including politicians, civil society, and the media, to urgently address disinformation to counteract its intentional spread.

It should be emphasized here that response to the problem of disinformation raises the sensitive risk of restricting freedom of speech and expression. Therefore, to avoid undue interferences with the media freedom and access to information and ensure that the interventions addressing disinformation are based on international human rights standards, the Press Institute proposes the following recommendations for policies and actions.

1. DEVELOP APPROPRIATE POLICY REFORMS AND REGULATIONS TO MITIGATE MISLEADING INFORMATION THAT ARE IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

- 1.1 Restrictive legal measures such as criminalizing disinformation blocking websites and IP addresses are inconsistent with Mongolians' constitutional right to freedom of expression and the international standards of human rights. To avoid the chilling effects of such restrictions on democracy, this Recommendations section suggests avoiding unjustified restrictions on freedom of expression by taking advantage of vague and ambiguous ideas, including "false news" and obscurity of false, incomplete, intentional, or accidental misrep-

resentation. To this end, any restrictions imposed on media under the broad label of “Fake News” and “False News and Information” should be scrutinized, clarified, or repealed.

- 1.2 Any restriction must serve an appropriate purpose, and be a “necessary” act that duly takes into consideration protected interests, damages causes, and other potential consequences taken into account. For example, criminal charges for defamation, libel, and insults are excessive and inconsistent with international human rights standards.
- 1.3 Policies and regulations restricting freedom of speech and expression shall be reviewed and implemented by a party independent of political, economic, or other interests. It must be ensured that such implementation is not taken at one’s discretion; and punitive measures should not be arbitrary, discriminatory, or abusive.
- 1.4 Government agencies must be obligated to disseminate accurate and reliable information related to public health, the country’s economic situation, the environment, and citizens’ safety.

2. CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT TO SUPPORT INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND QUALITY JOURNALISM

- 2.1 Promoting a free and pluralistic media environment is an essential step in supporting ethical and objective election reporting, prioritizing quality information and fighting against disinformation. These include establishing a capable and credible entity independent from political and economic interests to be responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, the development of a free and pluralistic broadcasting sector, and the provision of financial resources and an independent management system for public radio and television to fulfill their legal obligations and secure public trust. Thus, the public is served with professionally prepared, high-standard content created by competent and ethical media.
- 2.2 Provide financial support for the preparation of quality and diverse content and make it available to the public. In doing so, restrict the possibility of misusing the financial and technical resource support and allocate and make arrangements to ensure the selection process’s transparency and independence.

- 2.3 Improve trust in journalism and media through enhancing the legal and self-regulatory mechanisms that promote transparency of media, including the transparency of media ownership structures and editorial policies.
- 2.4 Promote the value of professionalism in journalism and the practice of ethical and objective reporting to a functioning democracy among media executives, journalists, and journalism students; reinforce the principles of responsible journalism to increase the awareness of media professionals as the key players in fighting disinformation safeguarding the integrity of public space..
- 2.5 Promote the values of equality, mutual understanding, and principles of democracy among the public and combat hate speech, discrimination, fragmentation, and polarization caused by distorted and fabricated information to address the adverse effects of disinformation and propaganda.
- 2.6 Regularly conduct, support, and finance research to assess and promote the transparency of the information environment.

3. EMPOWER CITIZENS AGAINST DISINFORMATION THROUGH STRENGTHENING MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY

- 3.1 Implement proactive measures to address the key vulnerabilities of citizens to information manipulation through improving critical thinking and understanding of sources, intentions, tools, and objectives behind disinformation, raising awareness of media bias and the negative effects of disinformation. To carry out nationwide actions to support knowledgeable use of information, a comprehensive and integrated policy strategy to promote Media and Information Literacy (MIL) at all levels is needed.
- 3.2 Integrate media and information literacy content in policies and programs implemented in education, culture, science, information technology, and communications to empower citizens to take a critical approach to engagement with all types of media and information and facilitate resilient media engagement.
- 3.3 Engage mainstream media and civil society organizations in advocacy efforts to raise awareness on various methods and technologies used to falsify and create misleading information, support and

implement media and information literacy through editorial policy, and increase the number of educational and informative material and investigative publications, especially during elections, to verify the information and to combat misinformation.

- 3.4 To lay the foundation for building a media and information literate society through the formal education system, evaluate the content of media and information education in general education programs with international standards, and identify needs and opportunities. Engage stakeholders from education, culture, science, information technology, and media in activities to support and develop media and information literacy by incentivizing all kinds of human-centered efforts to increase people's resilience against disinformation.
- 3.5 Explore the possibility of integrating media and information literacy in tertiary education courses, besides the journalism course.
- 3.6 Create an enabling environment for the development of an informal media and information literacy system for adults by supporting and educating the staff of NGOs, libraries, cultural institutions, and other stakeholders.

Annex 1. List of monitored Facebook groups and pages

1.1 Groups and pages monitored during the Local Elections

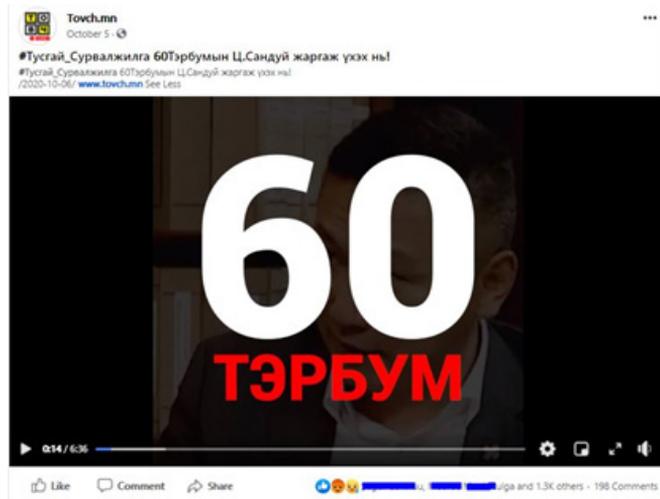
№	Title of FB pages and groups		Number of members/ followers
1	Ikon News	Online news media pages on FB	421,563
2	Zarig.mn		236,687
3	Товч.mn		274,000
4	МОНГОЛОО MONGOLOO	Public FB groups	403,290
5	Оффшор!!!		304,917
6	Шуурхай мэдээ		183,921
7	ИРГЭДИЙН ДУУ ХООЛОЙ		165,820
8	Олуулаа		135,132
9	Оффшор Авлигын Эсрэг Ард Түмний Тэмцэл		68,345
10	БАЯНХОНГОР АЙМГИЙН ЗАРЫН НЭГДСЭН БҮЛЭГ		45,352
11	УВС АЙМГИЙН НЭГДСЭН ГРУПП		106,565
12	ӨМНӨГОВЬ ЗАРЫН НЭГДСЭН ГРУПП		83,359
13	Diamond Хэнтий аймгийн нэгдсэн зар групп Khentii Hentii		42,160
14	Архангай аймгийн зарын нэгдсэн групп	46,183	
15	Аархал	FB pages	619,989
16	Би Mongol		172,225
17	Цахим толь		113,480
18	Сонирхолтой хуудас		114,315
19	Ухаалаг хуудас		81,792
20	Хатуу мэдээ		50,460
21	МАНай МАНгарууд татаанаа		18,266
22	МАНАН ОГЦОР		7,019
23	Шударга бай		6,205

1.2 Groups and pages monitored during the Presidential election

№	Title of FB pages and groups		Number of members/ followers
1	Ikon News	Online news media pages on FB	647,452
2	Zarig.mn		832,410
3	Товч.mn		386,432
4	МОНГОЛОО MONGOLOO	Public FB groups	407,704
5	Оффшор!!!		309,810
6	Шуурхай мэдээ		230,700
7	Олуулаа		149,820
8	Иргэдийн дуу хоолой		64500
9	Оффшор Авлигын Эсрэг Ард Түмний Тэмцэл		74,270
10	БАЯНХОНГОР АЙМГИЙН ЗАРЫН НЭГДСЭН БҮЛЭГ		50,898
11	УВС АЙМГИЙН НЭГДСЭН ГРУПП		113,697
12	ӨМНӨГОВЬ ЗАРЫН НЭГДСЭН ГРУПП		96 ,046
13	Diamond Хэнтий аймгийн нэгдсэн зар групп		42,274
14	Архангай аймгийн зарын нэгдсэн групп	62,789	
15	Аархал	FB pages	623,710
16	Би Mongol		169,396
17	Цахим толь		113,480
18	Сонирхолтой хуудас		111,760
19	Ухаалаг хуудас		80,979
20	Хатуу мэдээ		56,461
21	МАНай МАНгарууд татаанаа		56,461
22	МАНАН ОГЦОР		7,019
23	Шударга бай		6,655

Annex 2. Case examples of misleading content

Case box #1. Distorted content with incomplete facts and sources



Title: “Special reportage: the 60 Billion-Sandui is dying from happiness!”

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/262978864383867/posts/636174780397605/>

Original source: Tovch.mn

Format: Video

Audience engagement: 1300 reactions, (198 comments, 1062 shares).

Content description: The former chairperson of the City Representatives Khural Ts.Sandui has been investigated in relation to the 60 Billion-Scandal, but he is released from the prison and was even awarded during the City meeting. He is not entitled to be a politician due to many frauds such as illegal land trade.

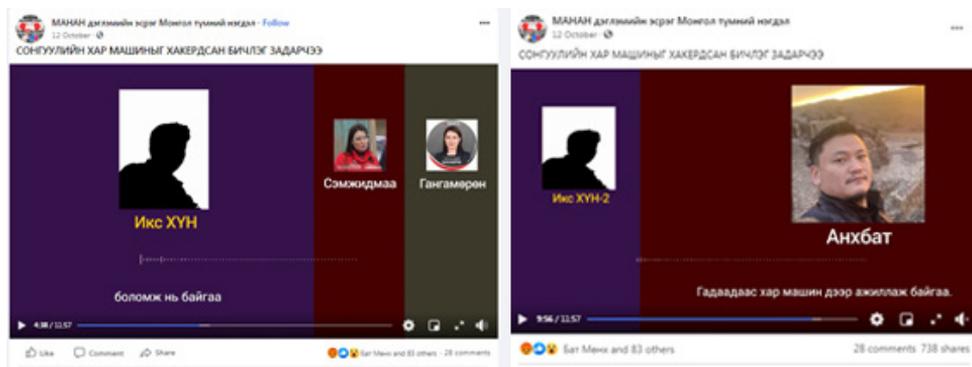
Tone of presentation: Negative

Purpose: Discredit candidates/parties, create negative image

Manipulation techniques used:

1. Card stacking – Facts or statements are partially true. This occurs when information is correct, but it is offered selectively, or key facts are omitted.
2. Exaggeration and over-generalization – Dramatizes and uses a particular premise to shape a conclusion.

Case box # 2. Deliberate use of false visuals to cause harm to the reputation of candidates



Title: A video of hacking the black election machine has been leaked

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/NoMananRegime/posts/2632241990362336>

Original source: Union of the Mongolian people against the MANAN regime (МАНАН дэглэмийн эсрэг Монгол түмний нэгдэл) / Page

Information format: 1. Visual (Video) 2. Text (11 minutes 57 seconds)

Content/Narrative category: 1. M1. Party/Candidate actions 1.1 Failures/Wrongdoing; 2. Candidates personality traits; 3. Candidates political/financial/business interests ; 4. Relationships/networks

Audience engagement: 739 distributions, 84 likes, 28 comments

Summary of content: A collection of images and subtitled audio records claiming to be the voices of the MPP candidates G.Gangamurun and B.Semjidmaa (2nd and third constituencies of the Citizens' Representative Khural) discussing the possibilities of manipulating the election results of the vote-counting machine in their favor.

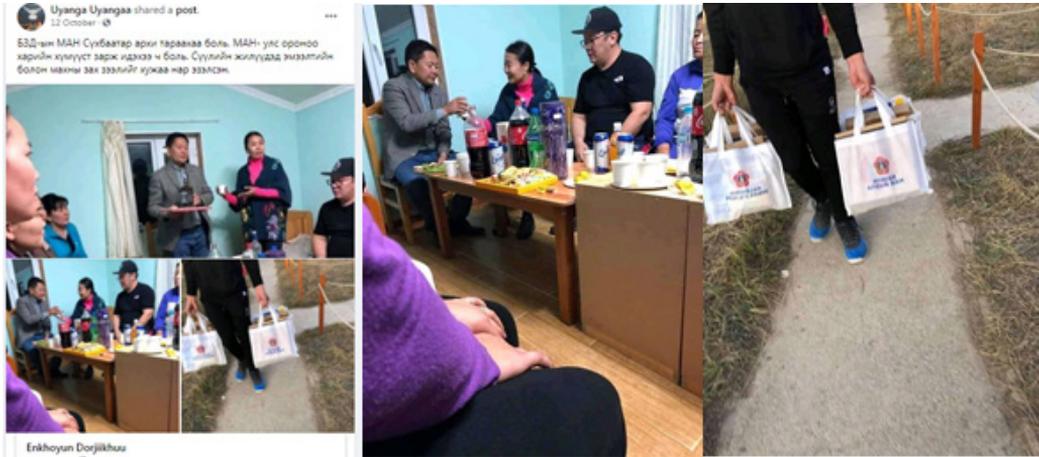
Information tone: Negative

Purpose classification: Discredit candidates/parties, damage reputation

Type of information: Disinformation: Deliberately distorted or incomplete information intended to cause harm to individuals, groups or organizations.

Manipulation techniques used: False visuals –use of manipulated provocative visual material with the purpose to lend extra credibility to a false fact or narrative.

Case box №3: Selective presentation of facts



Title: Bayanzurkh district MPP Sukhbaatar stop distributing alcohol. The MPP should stop selling its country to foreigners. In recent years, the saddle and meat markets have been dominated by the hujaa (derogatory term for Chinese).

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=664592707427898>

Original source: “Enkhoyun Dorjiikhuu’s personal Facebook profile

Message format: 1. Visual (Photo) 2. Text

Content/Narrative category: 1. 1. Party/Candidate actions 1.1 (claimed) failures/wrongdoing
2. Political interests of a candidate

Audience engagement: 726 shares, 132 likes, 72 comments

Content summary: B.Sukhbaatar, a candidate for Bayanzurkh district, should stop trying to buy teachers’ votes with alcohol.

Information tone: Negative

Purpose classification: Discredit candidates/parties, damage reputation

Type of information: Disinformation: Deliberately distorted or incomplete information intended to cause harm to individuals, groups or organizations.

Manipulation techniques used: 1. Card stacking – Facts or statements are partially true, information is offered selectively, key facts are omitted

Case box №4: Hidden advertisement



Title: Health sector employees consider U.Khurelsukh's 20 grand achievements as a reform.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/SonirkholtoiPage/posts/2946139115631421>

Original source: <http://songuuli2021.mn/>

Message format: 1. Visual (photo) 2. Text

Content/Narrative category: 1. Party/Candidate actions: 1.2 Achievements

Audience engagement: 21 shares, 33 likes

Content summary: During his tenure as Prime Minister in 2017-2021, U.Khurelsukh made 5 fundamental reforms in the health sector, solved 5 social issues, made 5 improvements in medical care, and implemented 5 innovations through new technologies and investments. For this reason, the the health sector considers these achievements as a true reform.

Information tone: Positive

Purpose classification: Promote candidates, parties or coalitions

Type of information: Implicit advertising: an item produced in the format of a standard journalism product but visibly supports a specific election candidate or a political party

Manipulation techniques used: 1. Imposter: misleading content created using the format of an established news program of mainstream media 2. Narrative laundering –“experts’ of dubious integrity present narratives as the truth.

Case box №5: Creating the impression that the “majority” prefers or understands an issue in a certain way. “People are asking..” “People want...” or “People know best.”



Title: CITIZENS: S.Erdene, who has been sharpened, is better than D.Enkhbat, who has been smooth for many years.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/oyutan.ireedui/posts/2249757215165474>

Original source: Arslan.mn

Message format: 1. Visual (photo) 2. Text

Content/Narrative category: 1. Candidates political / financial/business interests & status 2. General political/economic situation/issues

Audience engagement: 2 shares, 8 likes, 3 comments

Content summary: Citizens state the three main reasons why people support S.Erdene, the Democratic Party candidate.

Tone of information: Positive

Purpose classification: Promote candidates, parties or coalitions

Type of information: Disinformation: Majority's wisdom, opinions presented as facts

Manipulation techniques used: 1. Creating the impression that the "majority" of citizens support a certain candidate (S.Erdene); 2. Overgeneralization, loaded words/metaphors.

Annex 3. Terms and Definitions used for the monitoring

Information/unit of analysis is any uninterrupted content conveyed from a particular source, as combination of sounds, videos, images, images, and text, tied to that meaning, regardless of content or type.

News media: forms of media that prepare and disseminate information on current issues, situations, and events to the public in an open and regular manner, through editorial activities based on journalistic values and criteria. The study considers that the news media are subject to the same standards of journalism, regardless of the type of channel, or equipment used to disseminate editorial content (airwaves, cables, paper, and electronic networks).

Journalistic content: Content prepared for the public about current events, situations, issues, and stakeholders in accordance with professional journalism standards and practices. Content prepared using a variety of journalistic formats for the purpose of propaganda, manipulation, or misleading is not included in the category of journalistic works, regardless of the source.

Election-related information is any information (visuals, texts, combinations of text, video, graphics) that make a direct or indirect reference to the candidates for Parliament, or the parties or coalitions participating in the elections, or any issue or event related to the elections and the platforms of the contending political groupings. Keywords to identify 'units of analysis' include words such as 'election', 'electoral', 'elect', 'campaign', 'candidate', 'politician', 'political party', "constituency", 'ballot', 'electoral' 'vote(r)' or the names or pictures of candidates, names or logos of parties participating in the parliamentary elections.

Election advertising is any material published/broadcasted through media organizations and on social media platforms by political parties, political affiliations, and election candidates to affect the mentality of voters and aimed towards attracting more voters. This includes an election action plan, various activities, biographies of election candidates, any presentation and explanation of their current job positions, and any paid material and advertising that is aimed towards promoting the election candidate in any possible way that has been produced using journalism and PR methodologies.

Paid Advertisement

A media publication material is deemed to be paid advertisement if it falls into one of the following 12 criteria:

- Has a tag or stamp that says Paid or Reserved
- In newspapers: placed in a specific corner that says “Election – 2020.”
- Advertising of political parties and their action plans
- Items that feature representations of specific political parties and election candidates
- Biography of an election candidate
- News items that are solely based on information disseminated from the election headquarters, interviews, or any information about the election candidate
- Specific news and information programs containing the logo or icon of the political party
- Prompt news containing the logo or icon of the political party
- Advertising, jingles, and clips featuring the political party and the election candidate
- A joint program that features representations of political parties and election candidates
- Commercial or social advertising that features representations of political parties and election candidates

Implicit advertising is an item produced in the format of a standard journalism product but visibly supports a specific election candidate or a political party or visibly attempts to undermine or abuse the reputation of the competing election candidate or political party. This type of material is usually developed and published/broadcasted with particular payment or as a result of the intervention and authority of a specific election candidate or a political party. Implicit advertising is often found in the form of a paid advertisement from an election candidate or a political party.

Disinformation: Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization, or country

Misinformation: Information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm

Mal-information: Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organization, or country.

Annex 4. Definition of information manipulation techniques

(Based on the classification developed by the Center for European Policy Analysis, <https://www.cepa.org>)

Misleading title – Facts or statements in the article are correct or mostly correct, but the title is misleading.

Card stacking – Facts or statements are partially true. This occurs when information is correct, but it is offered selectively, or key facts are omitted.

False facts and/or visuals – Facts or statements are false. (Mentioning places, sources, or events that never took place). Use of fake or manipulated provocative visual material to lend extra credibility to a false fact or narrative. Real facts are denied or wrongly undermined. The facts of an event might be reported, but an attempt is made to discredit their veracity. Alternatively, the facts may be re-interpreted to achieve the same effect: to establish doubt among an audience over the validity of a story or narrative.

Exaggeration and over-generalization – This method dramatizes, raise false alarms, or uses a particular premise to shape a conclusion.

Imposter/Narrative laundering – Concealing and cleaning the provenance of a source or claim. When a so-called expert of dubious integrity presents false facts or narratives as the truth. Delivery of propaganda through mimicking the format of mainstream media. Featuring a guest “expert” or “scholar” on a TV program whose false fact or narrative can then be repackaged for wider distribution. For example, “the media state that...” or “A well-known expert says that....”

Changing the quotation, source, or context – Facts and statements are reported from other sources, but they are now different than the original or do not account for the latest editorial changes. For example, a quotation is correct, but the person to whom it is attributed has changed, or a quote’s context is altered so as to change its meaning or significance in the original story.

Loaded words or metaphors – Using expressions and metaphors to support a false narrative or hide a true one; for example, using a term like “mysterious death” instead of “poisoning” or “murder” to describe the facts of a story.

Ridiculing, discrediting, diminution – Marginalizing facts, statements, or people through mockery, name-calling (i.e., argumentum ad hominem), or undermining their authority. This includes using traditional and new media humor in order to discredit non-substantive merits.

Whataboutism – Using false comparisons to support a pre-fabricated narrative or justify deeds and policies; i.e., “We may be bad, but others are just as bad.”

Exploiting balance – “Balancing” content by featuring professional propagandists or faux journalists and experts to inject an otherwise legitimate news story or debate with false facts and narratives.

Presenting opinion as facts (and vice-versa) – An opinion is presented as a fact in order to advance or discredit a narrative.

Conspiracy theories – Employing rumors, myths, or claims of conspiracy to distract or dismay an audience.

Joining the bandwagon – Creating the impression that the “majority” prefers or understands an issue in a certain way. The majority’s presumed wisdom lends credence to a conclusion or false narrative, e.g., “People are asking...,” “People want...” or “People know best.”

Drowning facts with emotion – A form of the “appeal to emotion” fallacy, by presenting stories in such an emotional way that facts lose their importance.

Creating the context – Most commonly found on broadcast news programs, it creates the context for a pre-fabricated narrative by preceding and following a news story in such a way that it changes the meaning of the news itself.