

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE TRADITIONAL MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA

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Abstract: *This study consists in the examination of the development trend of the traditional media in the area of network. The aim of this study is to analyse the influence of the media professional's attitude towards the new technological shapes, and the study of the impact that social media has in informing us and the way that this attitude towards the information has evolved.*

Hypothesis: Expanding and use of social media as a source of information has led the transformation of its manufacturing process and professional practices in the Albanian journalism.

It will be studied the impact that new information platforms have on the evolution of the traditional media and the changing access of the audiences towards the information.

Research question: How has the sourcing structure of the news in Albanian journalism changed within the impact of new communication technologies, particularly social media?

Key words: *social media, traditional media, audience, Albanian journalism.*

INTRODUCTION

Albanian media, likewise in the other parts of the world, is faced with the influence of the technological transformation. The transformation changes during the history from the Gutenberg epoch up to nowadays have had their influences in the information use industries.

History has proven that evolution is an irreversible process, this because of the technological developments, which have transformed the media not only in infrastructural concerns but also the process of communication relationship and the recipient of the information providers. For every step of technological transformations in the media, field researchers have tried to understand the impact on production processes, distribution and information to the public. With the technology development web 2.0, the attitude of the well-known authors McLuhan over on the technological determination in the individual-media relation, took a new development. The new media based on the “web” including here the last generation that we know by the term “social media”, are now a part of our daily life.

The use of broadband internet in Albania began to get enlarged more after the privatization of the main fixed telephony operator Albtelecom in 2007. Taking in consideration the navigation in the internet and mainly in the social media, it might be stressed that they didn't find a special space at the Albanian internet users at the beginning of the year 2000, this because of the fact that this period was the time of the private televisions enlargements and its high taxes. People are abandoning the old media to return more towards each -other, to share things through social

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networks that are still in their first steps, each has its own printing press (blog), his own radio station (podcast) or his own television (YouTube).

STUDY'S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims exactly reviewing the social media's role in the process of production, distribution and consumption of information. In a detailed way it shows how an analysis of the use of social networks by journalists, has affected their access to sources of information and interactivity with the audience.

Methodology of this study consists of a comparative review of social media with the traditional ones in terms of production, distribution and consumption of information, in the socio-political context of Albania.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA

The effects that the changes in the media, especially in the social media, have brought to communication field make up one of the greatest challenges of the scientific research in these fields. Not only does internet include all the skills that traditional media has, such as: text, image, graphics, animation, audio, video, up to date information, but it also offers a wide range of new features where the most important ones are interactivity, access upon request and the personalization of content. Essentially, Web 1.0 contained the model of unilateral communication where the information producers (media actors) imposed the customer (audiences) a specific content.

Web 2.0 technology brought a transformation in scientific research as well as in the field of media and journalism. Researcher David Holmes, in his edition of 2005 "Communication theory media, Technology, Society", defines Web 2.0 technology as "Second Age Media". Judging from the prospects of "Second Age Media", the tyranny that was attributed to traditional media, relates to their hegemonic role in the definition of culture as well as the individual effects, which are a result of their vertical structure. So, somehow, the customer has to see the case from the communication point of view which is dictated from mass media institutions. On the other hand, in 'Second Age Media' we deal with a bypass of this type of institutional communication passing on to a less mediated mutual communication.²³⁵ Stephen Coleman and Karen Ross have described the essential differences that digital technologies brought, particularly internet, providing a wide media and democratic space.

The monological features of traditional media, based on one-to-many type of communication, have been transformed, from a fixed centre, to a many-to-many type of communication where the sender of the messages can expect to receive messages simultaneously.²³⁶

It can be said that Digital media and Internet has destroyed the elite domination regarding to the information production and distribution. It also has increased public access to a wider knowledge and information. Enabling access to media technologies, providing a low cost and accessibility to all, digital media has expanded the product range of media resources; anyone can become a media content producer. However, we cannot include all generations, as different generations have different approaches to information acquisition. For example; the third age is more connected to television or daily print media. We should not forget the fact that for the

²³⁵ Holmes, Communication Theory Media, Technology, Society, 52.

²³⁶ Coleman, S. & Ross, The media and the public. "Them" and "Us" in media discourse, 95.

majority can be easier and perhaps more appropriate to get acquainted with the schedules set by media televisions. Morning coffee is accompanied by daily newspaper news. Unlike the traditional media, digital media has a flexible agenda related to the information distribution. Digital media means quickly news distribution. We should not overpass the difference between the public of these two kinds of media.

The traditional media audience, unlike the digital media, acquires that information that is being produced in a certain period of time. So, the audience cannot select the information, but he only acquires the information transmitted in the television. We cannot say the same thing for the digital media audience, as the latter is totally free to choose the news or information that he wants to follow, just one click on the page or the link he is looking for. It is important to have internet access and he selects the news or the desired information. It is not necessary waiting for or acquires the unnecessary information or news.

There are many differences between social media and traditional media, but below are going to be mentioned the three main ones:

- The users of social media actively participate in the content, posting links or news topics from different resources, whereas in traditional media, on whose contents the audiences are constantly exposed, is mainly determined by professional editors, who have control over the daily flow of news.
- The users of social media, even though they are separate because of the physical distance, create links between each other based on their same or similar interests and approximate points of view. Consequently, the information might be shared through these virtual online communities and it might also become part of wide discussions in a short period of time. In this case, social media dissolves the boundaries of inclusion and the public debate might contain topics and individuals who would cope with obstacles that would prevent them from conveying their voice within the traditional system.
- The audiences make the difference between social media and traditional media. They can customize their choice of information and interact with each other. This happens through the choices that social media users make during their activity within the network.

The number of sources and channels of information as well as the great opportunities for interactivity and cogeneration that the information consumers have nowadays, have significantly affected the news consumption. Within the major transformations that have come along with the raise of social media, we also face the changes that the theory of "gatekeeping" has undergone. According to this theory, the journalist was given the right to convey the message to the audience. Axel Bruns describes "gatekeeping" in a classic form and considers it a necessary practice in the era of mass media.

A news edition or a number of newspaper pages can only offer a limited amount of news. This way, it was deemed reasonable to have a professional team that selects the information and provides the audiences with the most important topics.²³⁷

Bruns separates "gatekeeping" in three stages that are related to the steps that the journalistic process follows:

- The first stage has to do with the "input", the default of the basic information which serves to build up the news. In this stage, within the different news, the journalist elects

²³⁷ Bruns, Gatekeeping, Gateëatching, Real-time Feedback new Challenges for Journalism, 119.

the ones that have a high informative value and serves the public interest. At this point, there are many discussions in terms of the capacity, the vocational and social training of the journalist, the affects that he might have at this stage and also the impact of his selection of social and political developments of the society.

- The second stage is the “output”. On this stage, the “gatekeeping” decides over the collected and prepared information that is going to be passed to the audience.
- The third stage, according to Bruns, is “response”. At this point, only a selected group of audience responses may be included in the content of the newspaper in the following days or the subsequent editions. This will only happen if there is a reserved space for these responses in the broadcasting of the following day.

The researcher Artan Fuga, qualifies this system as an “individual authoritarianism” where a group of directors can arbitrarily decide on the information that the audience is going to consume. The researcher McLuhan, known for his famous axiom “medium is the message” considered the traditional media as a tool in the hands of elite. We would then arrive to the conclusion that ‘elite is the message’. In the case of internet, media is the hands of everyone and this lead to ‘everyone being the message.’²³⁸

The main characteristics of the over distribution of media new reality is audience facing with a large information exposure. Starting from the idea that the information is a product for media market actors, they aim to maximize their Profit from the sale. For this reason, they use any distribution channel that is offered to convey information to the audience. This amount of information does not fit our needs. Here, it is included "spam" information and sponsored content in social media, which is imposed on us by violence. In this context, the risk of new media audience consists in his ability to find the needed information. Virtually that characterizes communication in social media that is in fact a second reality, making it possible “reality duplication”. Consequently, this type of communication is to close within them and disconnected from reality. New media users are increasingly choosing news or filtering information influenced by the opinion of well-known people in relation to the opinion of traditional news sources. In this way the user who distributes information on the network, even if the latter is not authentic product of his, takes the role of an "opinion leaders" or even the role of a "gatekeeper" that decides which news or information is available for his network friends. All these are due to the interactivity that characterizes the new media, where each individual becomes a kind of media itself. For this reason, the audience of traditional media is reducing, though the latter is trying to transform in front of the new conditions of information distribution, by integrating information coming from new media to its sources.

Albanian media context

Regarding the concept of the public area in Albania, its use began with the fall of the dictatorial system and the allowance of political pluralism. If we start from the concept of Habermas for the public area as a space where public opinion is formed, then it seems difficult to talk about a fair public space in the period of communism. Freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are concepts without which it cannot be discussed for the public area. Albanians, immediately after the fall of communism, began to articulate their thoughts and opinions about the social political development and the actors involved in these developments. The birth of free press brought the opportunity to express critical thinking. The change of the political system brought a "noisy" start after the long public silence. The release of the informal

²³⁸ Zguri, Mbi shkaqet e braktisjes së mediave tradicionale, 174.

public area has sensibly awakened the interest of Albanians in public affairs. The public area in Albania as well as in the other countries of the region in the post-communist period resembled the process of forming the public area in Europe of the 18th and 19th centuries. The new public sphere created a space for the creation of autonomous collective action organizations that make up the essence of civil society.

In post-communist Albania the developments in the communication and public area are moving fast. While these paces have consequences for the quality of the transformational steps, the stages of media development and communication space "mutilate" one another. Initially Albanians characterized a great desire to be informed by new and "free" sources. They had just come out of great isolation and the need to be informed without censorship and freely expression was the main feature of the post-communist years. The first opposition newspaper "Rilindja Demokratike" was created on January 4, 1991, then passed on the phase of private television establishment such as "Tv Shijak" in 1995 and "Tv Klan" in 1997, while in 2000 the Albanian public would be acquainted with the first information portal on the web "Balkan web". Online media have reported an important overcrowding regarding public discourse. In the second decade after political pluralism, we have a dramatic development in the field of media and communication technologies. Online media have grown considerably after the establishment of social media (Facebook, Twitter etc). Albanians rushed again to try the innovations that brought the new media. Soon, the number of individuals using social networks was "hundreds of thousands". Of course, in such a situation even the public discussion was shifted. Now politicians and other actors understood the opportunities offered by Cyberspace by adding public discourse and the "virtual" element.

Albanian context offers many examples which show that the social media users, thanks to the opportunities to build up virtual communities, may organize themselves through interactive communication and discuss or oppose a particular political action or a wrong decision.

Example: The spread news that the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons would take place in Albania caused a strong reaction from the audience. Facing the fact the televisions and major newspapers, with or without purpose, weren't making it part of their informative agenda, encouraged the reaction of a considerable number of citizens about this issue. A community on Facebook organized a campaign which gathered a lot of people. In very few hours, the Facebook page against the dismantling of the chemical weapons in Albania reached a high number of followers. This Facebook page served to organize protests which followed later. The case of the protests against the chemical weapons, mediated and enabled by social media, is a genuine example of how media enables public debate, which furthermore serves as an alternative public sphere where the public opinion is given a 'shape'.

The government had to take steps back because of strong objections from the public opinion. The official Facebook profile of the Albanian Prime Minister was covered in comments and critics related to this issue and this situation forced the head of government to work more on how to reply to the critics against him on Facebook, rather than those who were commenting the issue on the television screens. Judging by this case, we can freely say that media in Albania has reached the digital media area, like a great number of other countries. It should be mentioned that, unlike other countries, especially western countries, it was very difficult for Albania to reach this era because of its political and social history.

Albanians, after the fall of communism, discovered ‘the other’ as a harmless object for dialogues. In fact, this is the moment when ‘oral taboos’ of the past are broken and the borders of allowable discussions are crossed.²³⁹

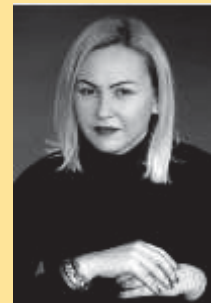
Initially, Albanians had a great need to get informed from new and “free” sources. They had just left behind a big isolation and they had a big need to get informed without censorship and express themselves freely. In the late 90s, private televisions and newspaper brought for the first time the pluralism of information which was once the exclusivity of ART (Albanian Radio Television). After 2005, apart from TV media, there were also informative televisions which helped creating and expanding the diversity of the ways to spread the news. As mentioned above, the internet and the massive use of social media began after 2009.

In 2014 Albania counts 1.360.000 active users of Facebook from which 98.000 access the social media from their mobile phones.²⁴⁰ (Wearesocial, 2014)

Televisions, newspapers and radios have now their own websites where they are free to publish all their contents. Also, the three traditional media have their own official profile on social media, especially on Facebook. It is noticed that, as the time goes by, these media use social media to increase their viewership not only on social media, but on their original media as well. Also, they tend to create interactivity with their audience in order to measure their viewership of their programs and to use various reports as sources of news which are mainly based on images.

Former news editor in ABC News Television, Mr. Armand Shkullaku, admits that there are cases when the information comes from social media user and it gets published in its original form, without the intervention of the editorial. This happens, he says, when the denouncement comes with images that are mainly related to the object where these images are also used for verifications, such as: damages in the forests, the occupation of a park from the buildings, pollution of a public environment. Meanwhile, some televisions, such as Top Channel, continuously promote their corporation channel “you report”, requiring the contribution of the audience for events they have witnessed. It is also worth it to mention the investigative programs in particular, which main object is reporting problems. The viewership of these programs is considerably high compared to other programs, which shows that the main reason for a wide audience is the interactivity with the audience itself since the very beginning of programming.

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²³⁹ Fuga, *Media, politika, shoqeria*, 20)

²⁴⁰ <http://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/social-digital-mobile-in-europe>

In this table it is noticed that in the bandage of the standard time period (20:00-20:59) when the investigative emissions are transmitted exactly at Top Channel and TV Klan , and the audience is concentrated exactly in these two media.

It is worthy to mention that the mostly watched emissions “Opinion”, “Top Story”, “X-factor” in big televisions such as Top Channel and TV Klan , are integrated the audiences of the social audiences, rising up the participation of these audiences, but also the shaping of the programmes above.

So, traditional media appears in this case that "calling" themselves in social media the help to increase the audience information sources and outlining the content. The combination of the sources of information from social media and their integration into current processes of information in the traditional media comes, it is increasing.

Artan Fuga, a researcher of the communication science explains to us exactly the connection with a concept that explains this transformation, what is happening with the information and its sources in the Albanian journalism. An important feature is to develop a new language codification of media information online. Multimedia period, the mobile phone (mobile) and Internet usage, it brought important phenomenon that was called media convergence.²⁴¹

Fuga raises questions of how newspaper newsrooms, television or radio within a single media company will function in terms of convergence. They will remain as a whole by paging all the information on a large central screen and then distributed in specific media, or standing still as independent units? In what ratio will stay the media version of the information stay in conventional media in comparison with those online? What are the differences between a newspaper number on paper and the same number in the online version? Which are the differences between a newspaper number paper based and that of an online version? These changes are determined by the fact that the information in the conventional media and the same information is placed online, being broadcast by different technological channels, it cannot be structured the same way. Even the public perceives them differently. Not "read" like on the screen as well as a paper page. At the first read vertically, while the second is horizontally.²⁴²

Regardless the degree of the diffusion model of convergence, Albanian media is in a constant effort to adopt it. In Albanian media it can be noticed that convergence is seen as an opportunity to add and alternate channels of information distribution .

Newspapers and main television stations are implementing a strategy which is based on the model 'multiplatform'. The main purpose in this case is to provide an "escape route" to withstand continuous erosion that including conventional media nowadays. basic argument is: " being present in every moment there where the audience / user is ."

Besides broadcasting, Top Channel distributes to the customer through a rich and updated website. Meanwhile, media product can also be accessed through the television profile in Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

In addition to the virtual space of information or content distribution produced in the television studio, we can find other posts that aim to increase the interactivity among users. Also we have content and promotional nature, whereby the intended promotion of the television various

²⁴¹ <http://al.ejo-online.eu/mediat-e-reja/sfida-perpara-mediave-shqiptare>

²⁴² <http://al.ejo-online.eu/mediat-e-reja/sfida-perpara-mediave-shqiptare>

products before their occurrence. Examples are illustrated by short videos "promo-video" as recognized in language television, the television network profiling in Instagram, which precede the audience with summary information on what they will see. In this context we have an orientation towards convergence editorial where media actors in Albania have created special groups within the traditional editorial newsrooms to engage specifically with the content network (Top Channel, TV Klan, Vizion Plus etc).

This transformation of traditional media is mostly happening with television, while other traditional media such as radio has not changed the content; they just dealt with a new official websites on the Internet. Televisions are placed on the pressure of shifting audiences in terms of online audience, causing decrease in advertising budgets.

Therefore, the integration of TV content with information sources from new media; Creation of live stream platforms that enable the television programs following in the network; Empowering the TV with real-time information; "Actors" and themes interplay that emerge from social networks in television content are some of the forms that are being pursued by televisions in their challenge with new media.

However, it should be noted that in Albania, the credibility of television news is still dominant in relation to news broadcasts due to the television's influence during the Communism Period (1960-1990). Precisely the lack of technology in Albania's economy makes it possible that even though the audience is largely oriented towards the new media, the budgets towards these media are at minimal levels in relation to the traditional media. The perception of the Albanian audience towards the new media is not yet clear and reliable in the context of the economic and business functions and opportunities offered by the new media. Despite this, there is a growing trend towards the "exploitation" of these media in the function of business development and its promotion, but this trend is still far from the expectations and pace of the Western world. New media in the world are not only transforming journalism but even economical and financial models. In this context, journalism has started changing while the impact of new media in the economic and financial model has no power to influence. However, the pace of the day-to-day changes of all developed economies around the world will force all other countries, adapting quickly as the only way to be part of the economic market and not just informative. In addition to this "economic pressure" in Albania is also the "Generation Changing Pressure" that is taking over the management of businesses and the media.

CONCLUSIONS

Social media are in the course of a Continuous technological evolution. Media researcher Rrapo Zguri an uppermost important author in the field of media, David Domingo which states: In their experience of studying journalism in the web, researchers cannot escape sensations of being observers of a new-born creature, which is still exploring its language, finding its rhythm and creating her routine²⁴³

The main impact of social media it is seen in the exercise of the profession of journalism and the production process information. The use of social media by journalists in Albania has affected all stages of the information production process, from the initial search for information, resource structure, deontological principles of journalism and to solicit feedback from the audience.

²⁴³ Zguri, *Gazetaria shqiptare ne internet*, 4.

The utilization of social media platforms creates more opportunities for journalists. Social media has facilitated more intermediate processes in the production of information, although Albania has not yet clear policy in terms of relationship that journalists need to build with the new media and therefore has not yet strategies for effective use of these platforms.

The reference to social media as an information source by journalists in Albania has changed the original structure of the news. As outlined above, the social network Facebook remains the main social media where journalists are directed to obtain information. We can say that currently on Albanian journalists but not limited to, the choice of social media for information source is more a liability than elections despite the lack of reliability of information by journalists. Journalists consider social media as an opportunity to monitor the actual developments, to be closer to sources of news to present their work, to discover new ideas, to strengthen links with the audience and to monitor reactions of the latter.

Through the above examples, journalists agree that the information coming from social media has influenced the report quickly to events, the content of news bulletins and thematic programs, noting here and increase the audience in their media products precisely because of interactivity created through the traditional media format intertwining with innovations in information and its structure of social media. After all, the basic principle of modern journalism in Albania is: "To be where the customer is," so medium that the customer chooses to be informed will be the main medium and the journalist will be used to obtain information and for diffusing them.

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