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A VOICE FOR MANY, INFLUENCE FOR FEW

The Impact of Online and Social Media On The Freedom Of Expression in SEE Europe

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The Impact of Online and Social Media On The Freedom Of Expression in SEE Europe

A REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Ioana Avădani, Romania

The present report is the fourth in a series of reports examining less-explored angles of the freedom of expression, prepared within the frame of the South East European Partnership for Media Development. It looks at the role played by the online and social media in South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM, Montenegro and Serbia, but also Bulgaria and Romania). The report will look into how the social media add to, compete or replace the "traditional" platforms.

In particular, we looked at the development of the online media (including the social networks) and to what extent they complement or compete with the traditional journalistic platforms as people's source of information. We focused on the diversity of sources online, reflecting - or not - the diversity of social and political environments in our targeted countries. Importantly, we analyzed the impact of the social media on the public agenda and to what extent the Internet helped the freedom of expression. But we also looked at the quality of information and public discourse circulating online and if there were instances when this realm of freedom has been abused or restricted. Aware of the strong politicization of the media and public communications in the targeted countries, we analyzed the way the politicians deal with the new communication tools. Last but not least, we looked at the media and digital competences of the public and briefly addressed the media literacy issues deriving from the spread of the new media technologies.

This regional report is based on the national reports produced by our partner centers. In the preparation of the national reports, the authors consulted media reports and studies about the status of the media and journalism in their countries. They also conducted interviews with journalists, academics and IT experts. The national reports were completed with relevant information from Bulgaria and Romania that put in focus regional trends.

Combined, this information create a vivid, colorful - even if not rosy - picture of how the Internet impacted the free flow of information and free expression in the region.

THE PERVASIVE INTERNET

The Internet becomes a relevant, even prevalent medium all across the region. The infrastructure broadens, the technical capacities improve, the consumption increases.

In Albania, in July 2016 the Internet penetration rate reached almost 63%, compared to 0.1% in 2000[1]. There are more mobile phones than Albanians (3.4 million mobile phone users in a country with a population of about 2.9 million people)[2]. The traffic data for accessing the Internet through mobile phones at the end of 2016 was considerable, marking a 118% increase compared to the consumption per user in 2015[3].

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to the Communications Regulatory Agency (CRA)[4], 82% of the population uses the Internet. That is close to the level of the most developed European countries, where these figures range from 86 to 94%[5].

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in the first quarter of 2016, 72% of people aged 16 - 74 accessed the Internet, 61 % of them on a daily basis. When it comes to youth aged 15-24, the figure exceeds 90%[6]. Almost half of them do so using a mobile phone.

In Montenegro, according to the Ministry of Information Society and Technology of Montenegro[7], the Internet penetration in 2016 stood at (69.8% of the households. Official data for 2016 also show that it is mostly young people that use the Internet daily. More men (87.2%) than women (84%) use the Internet daily.

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia[8] on the use of ICT in 2015, 64,4% of the inhabitants have a computer, 63.8% have an Internet connection, and 56% have a broadband connection.

In all the countries covered by the study there is a significant gap of accessibility between urban and rural areas. There are also quite predictable differences of Internet consumption along age (young people use it more than the senior) and education (higher the education, higher the consumption) lines.

People across the region use the Internet differently. In Albania 67% of people aged 18-35 tend to use the Internet as a source of information, compared to 30% that used television, while press and radio merely reached 1.6% and 1.4%, respectively[9]. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, some 60% of the citizens consider the Internet their main medium of information, compared to 45% who opt for television[10]. The surveys show that television is still the most influential media in FYROM in terms of news consumption (90%), but the Internet as a news distribution channel is on rapid rise (from 19% in December 2014 to 37 % in April 2016). It is to be noted that social networks must be perceived as a channel, not as a subject in the public communication[11]. In Montenegro, the Internet is used mostly a as a socializing tool. Most households access the Internet to spend time on social networks (79. 7 %), but also to read newspapers (76. 4 %), use communication applications such as Viber or Skype (75. 2%) and send emails (67,3%). In Serbia, most Internet users are reading online newspapers and magazines, searching for information about goods and services and for social network usage.

Facebook seems to be the prevalent social network in the countries in our study. Facebook is indisputably the most popular platform among Albanians, reaching 1.4 million accounts as of June 2016, amounting to roughly half of the population[12]. The same goes for Serbia, where 90.3% of the Internet users aged 16 to 24 have an account on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as for Bulgaria, where studies show a large portion of the people above the age of 40 joining the network and Bosnia Herzegovina, where 30,53 % of the total population is a Facebook user.

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1 Internet Live Stats: http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/albania/
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 CRA is a national body that regulates all electronic communication in B&H. It is in charge of both the program and technical sectors of radio and TV stations, as well as of only the technical segment of the Internet. In terms of content, there is no regulation of the Internet.
5 http://www.b92.net/tehnopolis/internet.php?yyyy=2016&mm=09&nav_id=1178931
6 Usage of information and communication technologies in households – State statistical office http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2016/8.1.16.30.pdfaccessed March 2017
7 http://www.mid.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=257306&rType=2
8 Source: http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/29/10/17_Informacione_tehnologije.pdf visited: 13.03.2017.
9 Mema, Briseida. "Dilemmas on information in the digital era – the Albanian case," qtd.in Albanian Media Institute, "Online media in Albania: legislation, self-regulation, development, and main tendencies." 2016.
10 Proprietary research not publicly available.
11 Interview with Emilija Petreska Kamenjarova Communication expert from Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services
12 Internet Live Stats: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm

TRADITIONAL MEDIA VS. ONLINE MEDIA

When it comes to prevalence and credibility, there is a clear tension between the social media and the traditional media in the countries in our study. While providing more interaction, speed and an undeniable "coolness factor", the social media escape, in most cases, the credibility (such as it is) and the editorial control of the traditional media. It is no wonder that the traditional media try to make the best use of the benefits of social media.

In Albania, the practice of establishing Facebook fan pages is not only limited to specific media outlets, but has rather become a practice where all major shows, be them political or entertainment ones, have their own Facebook page. The same is true for Montenegro, where many traditional media have their Facebook profiles, used not only to publish their content, but also to communicate with their audience. In some cases it is the social media (Facebook) that includes a topic or an event on the public agenda, even when it is ignored by the "traditional media".

The number of online news portals is unknown at the moment in Albania, while the Union of Albanian Journalists claims they are as many as 650[13]. The ability to engage citizens by providing content, as well as the not-so-serious nature of content published are thought to be among their key success factors[14]. Sometimes the website also includes reports of citizens denouncing some injustice, especially from authorities, e.g. videos when stopped by the police, thus documenting law violations and providing a needed public service.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the young generation seems to have definitely "migrated" online. More than 50% of young people said they mostly gain information from news, technical and entertainment sites on the Internet, while 40% mostly gain information through social networks[15]. Facebook is the most popular social network in the country. Twitter has a significantly smaller number of users and those who are active on it are mostly politicians, representatives of the NGO sector, media and various companies who use this network solely for activism and sending political messages and promotions.

In FYROM, the legal framework fostered online media, but their misconduct has a backlash effect on the credibility of journalism. Online media are exempted from the Media Law, including the obligations regarding transparency. As a result, some prominent online news-sites are owned by companies registered in known offshore tax havens. There are widespread suspicions that the actual owners are Macedonian citizens, including some prominent political figures and holders of public offices. While protecting the anonymous owners, this legal arrangement exposes the online journalists. As online media are not explicitly mentioned in the legal definition of media, some judges did not grant the online journalists the protection that the defamation law provides for journalists and media, for instance, as far as the limit of the fines is concerned, reveals our Macedonian report.

Serbian citizens, quite attached to their traditional media (mostly to newspapers and TV) did not hurry to credit social media with trust. Still, exceptional situations - such as the massive floods in part of Serbia, in 2014, showed the important role social networks play in crisis times. Many people engaged in sharing information, offering assistance and exchanging opinions on this occasion, out-speeding the traditional media, that proved slow and unprepared. Then it was obvious that social media became a part of information and communication process in Serbia.

The same proved true in Romania, where the social media took over the role of the traditional media in exposing facts as they were and in mobilizing civic energies. After the fire that burned down the Colectiv music club in Bucharest, in 2015, killing over 65 young people and injuring hundreds others, it was through the social media that people exchanged information about where the victims had been take to, mobilized voluntary help, monitored the efforts of the authorities to manage the crisis and reported "from the field" about the dramatic situation in the hospitals (lack of medicine and medical products, lack of hygiene, feet-dragging in asking for international help, etc). Massive anti-corruption protests in the winter of 2017 were also organized and reported about via Facebook (including live transmissions).

In Bulgaria, Facebook is considered the one single social network that could really influence the agenda of traditional media. It has done so on a number of occasions. Civil protests in the country are predominantly organized via social media and Facebook, in particular. In that sense, traditional media are the ones that follow behind and simply report on events that have already been popularized on social media. In a couple of notable cases from a couple of years ago, TV channels refused to report on

13 Interview with AleksanderCipa, Union of Albanian Journalists.
14 Ibid.
15 Survey Mladiistavovi o korupciji (Young People and Views on Corruption), Media Initiatives, Sarajevo 2017.

environmental protests (or covered them in a negative manner), causing an outrage on social media and further eroding trust in traditional media.

DIGITAL MEDIA: BETWEEN FREEDOM AND (SELF-)CENSORSHIP

In all the countries studied, it appears that the online environment, social media particularly, is seen as a real realmof freedom of expression. Everywhere, people who have seen their work or opinions limited by the traditional media, "migrated" online and created new expression platforms for themselves.

In Albania, the new media and social media have certainly provided more space and freedom for journalists to express their views and to report on different issues that might not always be welcome in traditional media, at least in theory. Important names in journalism "took the digital way" seeking greater freedom, or following disagreement with their previous traditional media, or in the hope of starting something new.

Even though several well-known journalists have established their portals, the same journalists appear on a regular routine in current affair programs, which are almost daily, on several TV stations in Albania, or in a few isolated cases, also worked full time in traditional media as editors or directors of information

"Social media and new media are certainly a greater space for expression, communication, debate, and, why not, freedom. The novelty in communication is related to the diversity, interactivity and giving a voice even to newcomers,"[16] said Alfred Lela, founder of news portal politiko.al.

There have also been cases where Facebook or social media in general have been instrumental in reporting when the traditional media was not willing to report on particular topics. For example, one of the recent protests was that of the inhabitants of a small village, whose houses were damaged for years after an international oil company drilled the land continuously.

Bosnia and Herzegovina sees the same trend, with social media enticing people to check upon more and more diverse sources of information, and even engage in various forms of activism. As our report points out, this is evident even among children, who criticize schools and discuss various issues of their interest.

The FYROM media market seems to be in disarray, with hundreds of media outlets trying to survive by catering an abundance of news to a population of 2 million. Nowadays, the most visited news aggregator still farms news from 120+ online media (including websites of broadcasters and newspapers), only in the Macedonian language. More than 40 Albanian language online media are also available on its Albanian edition. In parallel, there are more than 1,000,000 Facebook users[17], which amounts to a lot of information and opinion channels. This abundance of online media comes against what can be seen as a deprofessionalization of the traditional media outlets. More than 50 editors of major media outlets were changed recently.[18] There is almost no mainstream media that is still run by the same editor from 5 years ago. The freedom that the Macedonian online media enjoy comes with a twist: some of them are used to publicly slam politicians and activists, but the court practice is that the online media in FYROM cannot be sued, especially if the owner is unknown, because they are not considered media under the current Media Law.

In Montenegro, the social networks tend to become the preferred channel to access news. The Facebook accounts of some publications fare better in terms of traffic than the publications' sites. The success of the social media is due apparently to the opportunities they offer for people to interact and make their views known in real time.

In Serbia, the digital media are the realm of those who want to be either better informed or to express themselves more freely. As experts put it, information can be easily go viral, but "the dust settles down" also easily and quickly. Still, the social networks became the primary - and in some cases the only - source of information for activists' initiatives of protest movements. People quickly learned how to use the live broadcasting facilities offered by Facebook in order to compensate for the fact that traditional media ignore or censor some socially relevant events. There were cases when whistleblowers appeared on social media and made progress in targeting the problem from the public agenda. These cases are frequent and well received by the public but they lack public support and further engagement. People who are "banned' from traditional media found refuge and

16 Interview with Alfred Lela, founder of politiko.al, March 30, 2017.
17 http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm accessed March 2017
18 META: Rich journalistic and editorial harvest: How did freedom fall?http://meta.mk/en/bogata-novinarska-i-urednichka-zhetva-kako-pagashe-slobodata/ accessed March 2017

speaking platform on social media. But, as observers note, still no one who was thus banned made a success in appearing on social media.

In Bulgaria, social media are increasingly seen as the way to avoid the censorship associated with traditional media.

The same is valid for Romania too.It was through social media that people exposed the catastrophic organization of the presidential elections that left thousands of Romanian abroad unable to cast their votes, after having stayed in line for hours in a row, some under severe weather conditions. The contribution of social media was even more important as some of the popular traditional media (TV especially) tried to downplay the situation, in some cases turning the cameras back from the queues and showing the "empty streets in front the polling stations". Through social media, people not able to vote mobilized their otherwise undecided families back home in Romania to go out and vote.

THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

While everybody seems to agree that the online media enjoy more freedom and provide voice for more diverse opinions, it is equally generally considered that the quality of journalism and discourseavailable on line is poorer or more questionable.

For the social media in Albania, the main identified areas of concern are the quality of the information, its tabloidization, marked ethical problems, and copyright issues. "Apart from a few cases you can count on one hand, most of online enterprises are still searching for a sustainable identity and trying to gain public trust. Credibility is very difficult to build when you constantly give in to temptation to have more clicks and when tabloidization and suspicious news are the norm." notes the Albanian report.[19] One can also note the lack of individuality of news portals, as they all roughly carry the same content, sometimes changing only the title and copy/pasting the text from one another, mistakes and fake news included.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the citizens became part of an "editorial practice", via their sharing preferences. Experts consider that this way the people may narrow significantly the areas of interest in the public sphere, cropping it based on what they like, not on what is accurate. All the same, they are able to put in the same public sphere content that is inaccurate, manipulative or even deceiving. According to the local experts, the online media are dominated by what they call "a vocal minority" who does not find echoes in the majority. This becomes particularly visible in times of elections, when if one were to draw conclusions based on the most common posts on social networks, they would have dramatically missed the actual results.

In FYROM, the abundance of information brought about bythe digital development has not led to better democracy, as expected. Instead, it facilitated total control over and distortion of the news agenda, with global consequences. In this respect, it is text book material the role the Macedonian small town of Velesplayed in generating the vast majority of so called fake news sites during the presidential elections in the US[20].

The abundance of media outlets does not necessarily mean a great diversity of news reporting. On the contrary, media – mostly pro-governmental and especially during the ongoing political crisis - often carry absolutely identical reports, so that suspicions abound that much of their political coverage is written in one center and then distributed for publication. In addition to oversaturation, the media scene is deeply divided along political lines, usually presenting just one side of the story. The news agenda is further distorted by the ways the algorithms work in ranking the content without a human reasoning behind. Algorithms usually rank better the news clusters that have more sources or keywords on the same subject. Thus the more media cover an event, the more important this topic appears. That can be - and has been - misused for propaganda purposes since the clusters of media that are close to some center, for example to a political party, or simply copy paste the same content among them, appear more influential. This situation is widely used by political factions to create and publish completely false news, which later on are endlessly quoted by other similar media close to the same political faction until the real source is hard, or even impossible to locate. Considering that digital media literacy level is low, especially among the elderly population, the options for manipulation are endless.

19 Interview with expert Blendi Salaj for the Albanian national report.
20 BuzzFeed: How Teens In The Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters With Fake Newshttps://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo?utm_term=.rakjRWGXrL#.iuP471ANOo accessed March 2017

In Serbia, there is an open feud between the traditional media and the new ones. The traditional media consider that a large number of online media outlets, especially news portals, do not have journalists, but just people who follow what celebrities share on social networks and make news out of it - from entertainment to politics. Also, the use if social media to attract audience is seen as a cheap way to become popular. But as social media reach is based on users' reactions rather than on their critical thinking, some media analysts consider thatthe online content is pandering to the lowest human instincts, which is effective in terms of reactions - clicks, page views, likes and shares. Thus, the level of journalism is rock bottom, andthere is almost no real content left, while what is left is "lost in the sea of crap".

POLITICIANS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The opportunities offered by the social media - wider reach, shorter reaction time, more freedom and interaction - have not been lost on the politicians too. It is not only the journalists and citizens that enjoy these opportunities, but the politicians too.

In Albania, the widespread presence and exploitation of Facebook from politicians lead to a sort of trend among portals and traditional media alike: Facebook journalism. Key politicians, such as Prime Minister, former Prime Minister, Mayor of Tirana, MPs, ministers, and other people are highly active on Facebook and their every move and sentence is promptly reported as news on TV news and news portals, with the media just serving as a transmission channel, rather than contextualizing or questioning the statements that are posted on Facebook.

The trend is not so visible in Bosnia and Herzegovina yet. According to media analysts, social networks are still dominantly used as a playground for entertainment and self-promotion. The government institutions do not consider social networks a public space yet and thus do not listen carefully to what is happening there. A very small number of politicians and political institutions are active on social networks,

In Montengero, more and more politicians and political parties use their Facebook or Twitter accountsto express their opinions, especially when they believethe traditional media is not paying the due attention to their views. One example is Nebojsa Medojevic, the leader of opposition party Pokretzapromjene (PZP). For many years he has been using Facebook to express his political opinion; starting this year he has been using Facebook live option to hold weekly online conferences. As one of the opposition leaders and critics of the regime, Nebojsa Medojevichas failed to get any broadcast space on the public media for about two years.

In FYROM, the gradual conquest of the entire media space by the ruling party is a salient feature. In the last several months after the elections on December 11, 2016, it is to be noted that Twitter, the second popular social network, gained many new users, while the old ones suddenly became very active[21]. A quick analysis shows that many users defend the political option in power since 2006, especially the nationalist political party VMRO-DPMNE. This indicates an organized attempt to flood the social networks with support for this political option.

Noteworthy, that this is a one-way communication. Local politicians rarely engage in discussions with the other users. On the other hand, with every political option having hundreds of trolls, analysts consider that it is almost impossible to have a decent debate.
As for the foreign diplomats[22], politicians use Facebook and Twitter to publish and promote attitudes more frequently.

In the beginning, Serbian politicians on social media were rather exceptions, limited to the so-called "twitterers" such as Gordana Comic or Goran Jesic. Currently, almost all politicians,left and right the same, usetheir accounts on social networks very actively, especially Twitter. But analysts point that politicians use social networks same as traditional media– as just another channel of one way communication. Social media is not used for the exchange of views, but as a platform for stating their views, becoming an important part of politicians' PR platforms.

In Bulgaria, PM Boyko Borisov is a great example of a politician who is really active on Facebook. He has over 185,000 followers and shares pretty much everything he does as a politician. Traditional media rigorously follow his posts and report on them. Online new media go as far as posting breaking news that are just quotes from Borisov's Facebook wall.

21 Interview with DarkoBuldioski, Digital Media Consultant
22 British ambassador Charles Garret blog: Five Thoughts on Diplomatic Tweeting in Macedonia https://blogs.fco.gov.uk/fcoeditorial/2017/02/06/five-thoughts-on-diplomatic-tweeting-in-macedonia/

The same is true for Romania, where many high-level politicians use their Facebook accounts as an important (if not the main) channel of communication. The social media became relevant in politics in 2014, when now president Klaus Iohannis managed to increase his support from 30% in the first round to 54% in the second round mainly based on social media campaigns. Back in 2014, he was the first European politician to go beyond 1 million followers on Facebook, overpassing Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel[1]. He and his team continue to use social media including for official messages. Other politicians voice freely their opinions on social media, some of them using foul language and not refraining from openly threatening those who express dissent. In February 2016, when the Social-Democrat leader Liviu Dragnea promoted a draft legislation that would have sanctioned "social defamation" with prison penalties, he received an avalanche of criticism from both media organizations and Internet users. His team deleted some 3000 negative comments from his Facebook account[2], which immediately attracted another wave of criticism and 4000 more negative comments on his Facebook account. Other politicians use to delete their posts that prove to attract negative comments form the public, but online activists became vigilant and make print screens of those posts as they appear and re-circulate them on social media later. Some politicians have been sentenced for discriminatory comments posted on Facebook.

NEED FOR EDUCATION

The big picture of the online media in the Western Balkans, Bulgaria and Romania shows us a vast uncharted territory, in which users, journalists and politicians try to fathom the rules and divide the powers. Blatantly missing from the picture are the educators.

The media, educational and political spheres in Bosnia and Herzegovinado not question the fact that it is essential to act in the direction of media literacy. However, the state, shackled by efforts to protect its basic existence and torn apart by ethnic and political conflicts, cannot take a step forward and develop systemic and content elements of media literacy related to digital media and their content.

In FYROM, a young democracy still building its immune system, these problems are more obvious and have more devastating consequences. Out of the countries in the region, FYROM has made the most determined steps toward developing a media literacy education program. The participants in this endeavor - academics, teachers, journalists, CSOs - consider that media literacy should become an important part of the educational cycle, as well as a topic for a public awareness campaign. Media themselves, as most concerned party, should play their role in raising audience awareness, because their task is not only to inform and entertain, but to educate.

Serbian public is characterised by a low media competence, in various respects. Most users do not find the privacy policy important. Media illiterate audience is also a reason large amounts of false news are being published, while reality-shows and tabloid-like content is largely distributed and consumed, to the benefit of those who want to limit people's critical thinking.The result of this extremely low levels of media literacy is a huge vulnerability to false news. The problem is aggravated by the fact that there is no serious and regular discussion in Serbia on the issue of fake news. Some observers of the local media landscape think that the Press Council, working as a self-regulatory body whose credibility is in constant growth, could be an important factor in securing themedia education of the consumers.

In Bulgaria,the media self-regulation seems to have failed: although existent is not functional, which opens the door to third party interference. But so far, there have been no vocal calls for tightening control over media in connection with fake news. The freedom of media is generally seen by people, professionals and authorities as something that should be preserved and promoted however there is no clear agreement on who takes ownership and leadership.

Romanian authorities seem not interested in promoting media education. The few initiatives in the field belong to CSOs such as the Center for Independent Journalism and Mediawise and are supported by private money. The important media are either not willing to invest efforts in this respect or oppose the move claiming that they could not support any initiative that would "teach people what TV channel to watch or what to read".

1 http://www.business-review.eu/featured/klaus-iohannis-is-the-most-popular-european-politician-on-facebook-73447, accessed November 2017.
2 Evenimentul Zilei newspaper, http://evz.ro/romanii-s-au-unit-impotriva-legii-lui-dragnea-internetul-striga-jos-cenzura-petitie-online-impotriva-legii-anti-defaimare-care-incalca-un-drept-fundamental-campanie-evz.html

ONLINE MEDIA IN ALBANIA - NOT YET A GAME CHANGER

Ilda Londo, researcher
Albanian Media Institute

Technology, the spread of the Internet, and the need to have fresh, reliable, and public interest stories in the media are fertile conditions for experiencing the shift of public attention and trust from traditional media, which might be professional, but not independent, to online media, which can provide a greater degree of freedom to journalists. However, viewing that as a battle of two opposite camps would be, at best, an oversimplification, and, at worst, myopic. For this purpose, the report looks into the factors that favourthe rise of online media and social media, the novelty brought to the traditional media scene, the evolution of media and the audience trends, as well as the quality of information available to Albanians in the context of the new media development and the widespread use of social networks.

THE INTERNET AND THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIA CONSUMPTION TRENDS

According to data of Internet Live Stats, until July 2016 the Internet penetration rate reached almost 63%, compared to 0.1% in 2000[1]. Data from the regulatory authority of electronic communications also reveal the continuous increase of the Internet spread among the population: the last quarter of 2016 marked a 9.7% increase in fixed line subscribers and 10% in broadband access from fixed lines compared to a year ago[2]. The wide spread use of mobile phones has also further facilitated the Albanians' access to the Internet. Although there has been a slight decrease in mobile telephony users in 2016 compared to the previous year, the number of users remains substantial: 3.4 million mobile phone users in a country with a population of about 2.9 million people[3]. The traffic data for accessing the internet through mobile phones at the end of 2016 was considerable, marking a 118% increase compared to the consumption per user in 2015[4].

Even though the consistent spread of the Internet is indisputable, there are also disparities across the country and different factors affect the Internet access. The Department of Journalism and Communication at the public University of Tirana conducted a national scale survey on several aspects of digitalization in 2015, revealing, among other things, that the more remote one is from urban centers, the more difficultthe access to internet is: while access in urban centers is closer to 74%, in rural areas it reaches 48%.[5] The level of education seems to be another factor that affects the Internet access: 100% of the individuals with post-university education had internet access, whereas only 33.87% of the peoplewith primary education had such an access[6].

While it is clear that Internet penetration rate is significant, there is little information on the patterns of information sources used by Albanians, both in terms of so-called mainstream or traditional media and online and social media. Studies on audience and readership of media have been rare, not systematic, or the data have not been public, leading to speculations on the media consumption habits.

One of the few surveys on media use from the public was conducted in 2014. The data revealed that Albanians tend to refer to traditional media more for reliable information, even though online media had gained ground: 73% of respondents said they tended to trust information on TV, compared to 43% that trusted radio and print media, and 46% that trusted online media[7]. According to the same survey, 89% of Albanians said they watch TV everyday, as compared to 42% which use the Internet and 25% the press. In addition, 84% of the surveyed people indicated television as the main source of information for domestic political news[8].

1 Internet Live Stats: http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/albania/
2 AKEP data: http://www.akep.al/statistika
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Department of Journalism, "Digitalization of terrestrial television: challenges, paradoxes, hopes," 2015.
6 Ibid.
7 OSFA, "National survey on perceptions and expectations for future membership of Albania into EU," 2014.
8 Ibid

It would certainly be interesting to see the evolution of such data in 2017, but unfortunately the same survey has not been repeated to this moment. However, perhaps some light can be cast on media consumption trends from other surveys, of a different scale and nature, but trying to document media popularity trends. More specifically, according to a public opinion survey on impunity[9], conducted in 2016, television continues to be the main source of information, although the Internet and especially social networks are gaining ground visibly. A significant portion of respondents, 44% of them, said that they now use the Internet and specifically news agencies' websites for information on current affairs. Even more of them said that they use social networks for the same purpose – 56%[10]. This is a significant change compared to the same survey carried out in 2014, when only 22% and 14% of respondents, respectively, said they receive information on current affairs from the internet and social networks[11]. Another survey, conducted with young people, points to the tendency of this group to use predominantly online sources for information: 67% of respondents aged 18-35 tended to use the Internet as a source of information, compared to 30% that used television, while press and radio merely reached 1.6% and 1.4%, respectively[12]. However, the overall time the population spends watching TV remains rather high: 37% watch from one to two hours per day, 29% watch more than two hours, and 25% watch more than four hours[13], even though data on the programs they watch are not available.

When it comes to social media use, Facebook is indisputably the most popular platform among Albanians, reaching 1.4 million accounts as of June 2016, amounting to roughly half of the population[14]. According to 2015 data, 64% of these users were male, compared to 36%, who were female[15]. At the same time, about 73% of users at the time fell in the 18-34 years old group[16]. On the other hand, Twitter use remains behind Facebook in Albania: e.g. a singer, BebeRexha, seems to have the greatest number of followers at the moment, about 420,000[17], compared to more than the 2.3 million fans of the most popular Facebook page, Atom Computers[18].

TRADITIONAL MEDIA VS. ONLINE MEDIA

Rapid spread of the Internet and growing use of social media in the country has certainly affected the behavior of the existing or traditional media, as well as that of the digital native media. At this point it is even difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between traditional media, new media, and social media, in terms of the technical channels of dissemination of information, but also with regard to the content disseminated through these channels. Whether or not the traditional media have lost ground to the new media seems to be the natural question concerning the media community and media experts at this point. Given the lack of systematic and public audience and readership data on one hand, as well as the lack of availability of online audience measurement tools for websites in Albania, such a comparison is usually based either on interviews with media representatives or on sources of information that are not always highly reliable according to media experts regarding websites ranking[19]. The refusal of media outlets themselves, either traditional or digital native ones, to provide data on their online audience, also does not help to have a good idea of the popularity trends among existing media. However, periodic studies on this topic have indicated a clear trend: "the ranking of the most visited media outlets in 2016 and the comparison to data from 2014 shows the growth and empowerment of digital native media in Albania."[20] The same research data compared indicate that traditional media websites with improved ranking in 2016 compared to 2014 is limited to two TV stations, the remaining most popular media whose popularity has grown belong to the category of digital native media[21].

The new media outlets that are growing in popularity belong mainly to the category of news portals, meaning online media outlets that cover news and analyses of a general nature, including politics, economy, crime reporting, culture, and gossip and other rosier news. The number of online news portals is unknown at the moment, while the Union of Albanian Journalists claims they are as many as 650[22]. However, the figure is impossible to prove, since no prior registration with authorities is required.

9 IDRAMEDIA, "Impunity - Perceptions and experience of Albanian citizens 2014-2015," 2016.
10 Ibid.
11 OSFA, "National survey on perceptions and expectations for future membership of Albania into EU," 2014.
12 Mema, Briseida. "Dilemmas on information in the digital era – the Albanian case," qtd.in Albanian Media Institute, "Online media in Albania: legislation, self-regulation, development, and main tendencies." 2016.
13 Department of Journalism and Communication, University of Tirana, "Digitalization of terrestrial television: challenges, paradoxes, hopes," 2015.
14 Internet Live Stats: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.html
15 www.facebook.com
16 Ibid.
17 https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/twitter/profiles/albania/
18 https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/total/albania/
19 Usually the only source of information for Albania to refer to in terms of ranking of websites is Alexa.net, whose accuracy is often disputed by media representatives.
20 Albanian Media Institute, "Online media in Albania: Legislation, self-regulation, development, and main tendencies," 2016.
21 Ibid.
22 Interview with AleksanderCipa, Union of Albanian Journalists.

Only portals using a .al domain are required to register with the Authority of Electronic and Postal Communications, but this is valid for any website, not just news ones; not all news portals use this domain, which means at the moment there is no way to have official statistics on the existing number of news portals.

SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

Currently almost all traditional media have established websites and it is difficult to find any traditional or digital native media that does not have a Facebook fan page. In fact, the practice of establishing Facebook fan pages is not only limited to specific media outlets, but has rather become a practice where all major shows, be them political or entertainment ones, have their own Facebook page with which they communicate to the public. This practice has proved to be highly beneficial to improving the visibility and popularity of media outlets, especially digitally native ones, which are not always known to the public in the same way as the traditional media are. The media do not publish data on their traffic or online audience. However, a few interviews have revealed that social media presence is very important, as, in a few cases which agreed to provide data on the matter, a high percentage of the referral traffic came precisely from social media, rather than from organic traffic[23]. In addition, ads in social media, especially Facebook, seem to be of significant help in improving ranking, popularity, and visibility of new media especially. "During recent years, for many media outlets, paid advertising campaigns on Facebook have made an even bigger difference than just the number of fans; this was a practice used frequently by a good part of new online media launched during 2015 and 2016."[24]

The ten most popular Facebook pages at the moment[25] only include Top Channel TV from traditional media, which is one of the best known TV stations in the country, a commercial national TV station. The other pages include commercial pages, (Atom computers, Shpresa Computers, etc) and showbiz celebrities (ErmalMamaqi, GentaIsmajli). The other pages belong to a hybrid category, combining current news, with fun or viral content, bordering often on content of an offensive nature. Currently there are three such pages in the top ten most popular Facebook pages in Albania, Jetaoshqef (Life is fun,) Origjinale (Original,) and Shqiperiaime (My Albania.")

One of the researchers of online media trends in Albania likens the phenomenon of the rise of these pages, more particularly Jetaoshqef to the Buzzfeed phenomenon in the US. "By publishing mainly content that is oriented toward entertainment and human interest or curiosity; with its name styled in a dialect that conveys humor, Jetaoshqef currently holds the lion's share in the ecosystem of Albanian media."[26] The platform, both on Facebook, and on their website, is also largely supported on user generated content, in a clear invitation to the public to participate and contribute[27]. In fact, the ability to engage citizens by providing content, as well as the not-so-serious nature of content published are thought to be among the key factors for their success[28]. Sometimes the website also includes reports of citizens denouncing some injustice, especially from authorities, e.g. videos when stopped by the police, documenting violations. However, claims that Jetaoshqef and other similar websites carry well-documented and news of a classical journalistic form are still highly disputable. However, the fact that these pages are quite more popular than classical media or even news portals on Facebook is something to consider when trying assessing the kind of content that the public appreciates most and is certainly an invitation for reflection.

DIGITAL MIGRATION: ILLUSION OR REALITY?

New media and social media have certainly provided more space and freedom for journalists to express their views and to report on different issues that might not always be welcome in traditional media, at least in theory. In this context, there has been a visible trend of migration to digital media of important names in journalism. This has come either as a result of seeking greater freedom, of disagreement with previous traditional media, or in the hope of starting something new. Such portals include lapsi.al, founded by Armand Shkullaku and Andi Bushati, newsbomb.al founded by Anila Basha, 360grade.al founded by Artur Zheji, politiko.al founded by Alfred Lela, droni.al founded by Sami Neza, perqasje.com founded by Artur Nura, syri.net founded by Cim Peka, etc. However, it is difficult to speak of a clear-cut migration to digital, but it would be fairer to refer to a duplication of channels of communication. Even though several well-known journalists have established their portals,

23 Albanian Media Institute, "Online media in Albania: Legislation, self-regulation, development, and main tendencies," 2016.
24 Ibid.
25 https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/total/albania/?interval=last-month
26 Albanian Media Institute, "Online media in Albania: Legislation, self-regulation, development, and main tendencies," 2016.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.

the same journalists appear on a regular routine in current affair programs, which are almost daily, on several TV stations in Albania, or in a few isolated cases, also worked full time in traditional media as editors or directors of information. At the same time, online portals employ different methods of communication, including web TV, photo galleries, and other forms of communications used by traditional media.

However, it cannot be denied that online media and social media do provide a more relaxed environment in terms of editorial freedom than traditional media, at least to some degree. "Social media and new media are certainly a greater space for expression, communication, debate, and, why not, freedom. The novelty in communication is related to the diversity, interactivity and giving a voice even to newcomers,"[29] said Alfred Lela, founder of news portal politiko.al, after his contract as the director of a daily newspaper was not renewed in 2017, a case that along with the termination of the contract of another well-known journalist directing a news channel opened a new round of debate on the factors affecting independence in traditional media and their link to politics. Other journalists and media experts are more skeptical regarding the freedom that is supposed to come with new media and social media. "We are still not seeing examples of this considerable freedom, but this kind of communication has certainly made it much easier to reach the public, maybe even too easy at times."[30] Another opinion is that Facebook has not provided examples of important media freedom in terms of reporting, but is quite helpful for journalists to express their own personal opinions freely on their Facebook page, while officially, in the media where they work, they report in accordance with the editorial policy imposed there[31]. However, even such postings are not totally risk free, depending on the case. There have been claims from several editors and journalists that they have been fired as a result of Facebook posts, on their own personal pages, that were against particular persons or political figures, or were frowned upon by the media they worked in[32].

In this context, there have also been cases where Facebook or social media in general has been instrumental in reporting when the traditional media was not willing to report on particular topics. For example, one of the recent protests was that of the inhabitants of a small village, whose houses were damaged for years after an international oil company drilled the land continuously. After several protests they decided to walk to the capital and seek a solution, which was a process that lasted for several days. Due to the self-censorship and advertising patterns in traditional media, this event was either not covered or covered in a very brief and superficial way, although it was unusual news and of public interest, but the comments and reports on Facebook did not let the protest die and even mobilized some people to join protesters.[33] Another flagrant case is that of the investigative program Publicus, broadcast in Vizion Plus TV, where the management refused to broadcast their investigation on the murder of a minor working on a landfill in Tirana, implying also the failure of the municipality to enforce the laws on labor security and other violations, while the investigative team was let go immediately. The team posted on these events and on the program in the Facebook page, and also posted the program on Youtube, where it reached a high number of views in a short time. A week later the program, also as a sign of solidarity, was broadcast by Opinion in TV Klan, one of the most popular current affairs programs in the country. This is an example where social media do provide the freedom and opportunity that traditional media deny, but given that the program was then also broadcast by one of the most popular shows in the country it is not clear which channel was more effective in terms of spreading the information.

THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

A constant concern and doubt have surrounded the debate on news portals and social media in Albania: the quality of the information, its tabloidization, marked ethical problems, and copyright issues. Clearly, traditional media are far from immune to these problems, but they are likely to have a few more filters, as well as greater legal obligations compared to news portals. "Forms of non-professional conduct have existed even before social networks and will continue to be there; it is a matter of taking advantage of the opportunities that the social networks offer in the right way."[34] However, there are very few exceptions, such as reporter.al, the news portal of Balkan Investigative Journalism Network in Albania, which focus on current affairs reporting, but mostly on investigative reports, which have addressed topics that other media usually fails to address to the core, thanks also to the financial independence from Albanian media market scene of this portal. However, the general feeling is that

29 Interview with Alfred Lela, founder of politiko.al, March 30, 2017.
30 Interview with Blendi Salaj, co-founder of peshkupauje.com.
31 Interview with Bardhi Quku, March 30, 2017.
32 Interview with Rrapo Zguri, professor of journalism, April 3, 2017.
33 Ibid.
34 Interview with Emirjon Senja, albeu.com

this portal is an exception to the rule: "Apart from a few cases you can count on one hand, most of online enterprises are still searching for a sustainable identity and trying to gain public trust. Credibility is very difficult to build when you constantly give in to temptation to have more clicks and when tabloidization and suspicious news are the norm."[35]

In fact, it is difficult sometimes to make the difference from one news portal to the next, as they all roughly carry the same content, sometimes changing only the title and copy/pasting the text from one another, mistakes and fake news included. For example, the fake news on Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg telling how his ancestors were of Albanian descent made the rounds in several portals before someone realized that it was indeed fake news. Unfortunately there are numerous and increasingly frequent cases of fake news publication in Albanian media or in social networks, then also picked up in the media. "There are huge problems, especially in online media, regarding the verification of sources and facts. On one hand, this is destroying credibility, and, on the other hand, is further lowering professional standards. Unfortunately the debate on fake news in Albania is still at the beginning and is not an institutional part of newsrooms, limited mostly to a superficial treatment of the phenomenon, which risks delaying reaction and reflection needed to avoid publishing fake news in our media."[36] Other experts view the solution to this problem in communication among professionals and especially self-regulation and establishment of a healthy media environment[37], two goals that have proved elusive to the Albanian media professionals through the years.

Another major problem, related to lack of self-regulation and work ethics is the failure to respect copyright, one of the most sensitive issues for journalists and administrators of portals. In a context where the content is rather uniform and the same articles circulate all over the net, the news portals often try to beat one another in the speed of publishing new information, which is not always a good recipe. "The growth of new media and social media is inversely related to professionalism in journalism. Most online portals aim to post the latest news, without first verifying it; and they are much more focused on receiving more clicks, choosing what is interesting for the public, rather than public interest."[38] In addition, the news portals routinely copy paste content from one another, without permission, sometimes not even citing the source. In this context of increasingly fierce competition among news portals copyright problems seem to be among the top priorities for the staff of news portals, far more than professional ethics, as discussions on amendments to e-commerce regulation among professionals have shown.

Another phenomenon that affects the nature of information published is also the widespread presence and exploitation of Facebook from politicians, leading to a trend of Facebook journalism among portals and traditional media alike. Key politicians, such as Prime Minister, former Prime Minister, Mayor of Tirana, MPs, ministers, and other people are highly active on Facebook and their every move and sentence is promptly reported as news on TV news and news portals, with the media just serving as a transmission channel, rather than contextualizing or questioning the statements that are posted on Facebook. "Public relations are another aspect that has been greatly helped by Facebook, which has become part of political marketing. Social networks assist politicians to exert their influence on public agenda and in creating a particular mentality among citizens."[39] The prevailing opinion among experts is that social networks do not dictate the public agenda, but rather follow it[40]. "I have a dilemma: does society see signals from the virtual reality of social networks, or do the networks reflect the concerns and anger of society? My opinion is that in Albania social networks are still part of the mirror effect."[41]

MORE OR LESS FREEDOM OF SPEECH?

While new media and social networks have certainly improved the chances for communicating with the public, the ethical problems that existed in the realm of traditional media prove more difficult to address in the new environment, due also to factors such as interactivity, user-generated content, and anonymity. At the same time, self-regulation, which could ease the negative effects that come with this model of communication, is almost inexistent in this environment, as well as in traditional media, meaning there is a lack of tradition for self-regulation to take root. In this context, there are often calls for stricter regulation and rules on new media content.

35 Interview with Blendi Salaj.
36 Interview with Rrapo Zguri
37 Interview with Blendi Salaj.
38 Interview with Rrapo Zguri.
39 Interview with Bardhi Quku.
40 Interview with Blendi Salaj.
41 Interview with Alfred Lela.

Some efforts to regulate part of the content were provided by the adoption of the Law on Electronic Commerce in 2009, further amended in 2013, which aimed to harmonize Albanian legislation with EU E-Commerce Directive. According to e-commerce regulation, service providers that offer access to information for third parties are not liable for the information in case they were not aware of the illegal nature of the information, but once they become aware of such nature, they should remove the information. Furthermore, the law states that the service providers do not have the obligation to monitor the information and prevent illegal use of information.

The Ministry of Innovation and Public Administration is working on amending the e-commerce regulation, in order to include not only e-commerce, but also services of information society defined as online selling of goods, and services offering information, services that consist in conveying or preserving information through a communication network, etc. The amendments aim to establish some ground rules and responsibilities for portals, including those that convey information, such as online news media. The proposed amendment aims for the portals to provide basic details on their contact information, such as location, contact address, etc. The main novelty of the proposed amendment, and the most disputed one, is related to the responsibility regarding hosting. The proposed amendment specifies that the service providers do not bear responsibility for the content if they are not aware of any illegal action or content. In addition, the amendment stipulates that the portals do not bear responsibility if, when notified or informed of illegal action or content, they act quickly to remove access to the information, namely the "notice and take down" clause. The amendments have gone through several drafts and consultation meetings with different actors, but the initiative has been paused, pending other changes in EU legislation in this field.

Another significant development in legislative efforts to regulate online media content has been the amendment proposed by MP Majlinda Bregu. This proposed draft was first discussed in April 2015, aiming to introduce a new article into the Civil Code, establishing responsibility for publication of comments that affect a person's dignity and reputation. The proposed article further specified civil regulation of defamation, extending to online publication. The amendment would force administrators of electronic portals, including those of the media, to "prevent publication of any comment that infringes on a person's honour, personality or reputation." The main justification provided for introducing such a proposal came from the situation with derogatory comments by users of online portals and social media, as well as encouraged by the ruling on the Delfi vs. Estonia case. In 2016 MP Majlinda Bregu clarified that she had withdrawn the amendment.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly the information and communication practices in online media and social media will be a priority in the near future, just like the ability of traditional media to professionally evolve and keep up with the need to respond to audience needs and trends. While this is highly relevant for the development of the media landscape trends and for the economic model of the media outlets themselves, the value of news and information and respect for professional standards remain unchanged, at least in theory.

In the current context, online media face numerous challenges related to professionalism, including even basic routine procedures, such as fact checking and verification of sources, tabloidization, sensationalist content, copyright issues, etc. On the other hand, traditional media have recently started to enter the online media game, establishing their own websites and platforms, further blurring the lines between online and traditional media.

While in theory online and social media do provide greater freedom for journalists, in practice it does not seem that this freedom is substantial, or game-changing. At the same time, in the absence of self-regulation and professional rules and conduct, in the future it is likely that the legislation debate will be dominated by calls for stricter legislation for online media and for UGC.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ONLINE STATE

Radenko Udovičić, researcher
Media Initiatives.

The Internet is the most popular medium in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A survey by Media Plan Institute – "Media Consumer Habits in 2016,"[1] shows that **60 % of the citizens consider the internet their main medium**, 45% opt for television, while radio and newspapers are preferred by 2.5 %each. The survey confirms the indications, which the media sector in B&H has been working with for quite some time, that the Internet has surpassed television, which was sacrosanct until just yesterday. Namely, Media Plan Institute's survey from 2012[2] produced the following results:

Television 79%
Internet 10%
Radio 8%
Newspapers 3%

Data in both surveys reflect what citizens consume **most**, which does not mean that those who consume the Internet or television most do not also consume newspapers, but certainly to a considerably lesser degree. Moreover, the results of both surveys undoubtedly show that the era of print media in B&H is definitely over. That is confirmed by the circulation and sales of daily newspapers, which are half of what they were five years ago. The once most popular weekly news magazine Slobodna Bosna has stopped coming out in print and has moved to a different state of aggregation – online. "In 20 years, 1,000 issues of Slobodna Bosna came out and I think we gave our contribution to spreading freedom of speech and investigative reporting, but there is a market that regulates everything. The print media market is collapsing, especially for weekly papers. For a print paper to come out weekly, there has to be readership and advertising," the editor-in-chief Senad Avdic told klix.ba after the decision to shut down the paper was made at the end of 2015. "There is no longer readership, at least for print media, and the advertising share is small," said the well-known journalist.

The supremacy of the Internet is also shown by the latest survey carried out by the Communications Regulatory Agency (CRA)[3], with the information that there are 82 percent internet users in B&H.That is close to the level of the most developed European countries, where these figures range from 86 to 94 percent[4]. For example, in 2000, according to the same source, there were merely four percent Internet users in B&H. A detailed survey report has not yet been published, but last year's report covering 2015 provides the information that there are a total of 636,726 internet subscribers in B&H. The agency estimates that there were 2,782,107 internet users and that the rate of internet use in Bosnia and Herzegovina was 72.41% for 2015. Proceeding from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) definition, according to which an Internet user is any person between 16 and 74 years of age who uses the internet during the year, the Agency estimates that there were 2,782,107 Internet users in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015[5]. However, the percentages are certainly higher because there are some young people, especially in cities, who do not have internet connections at home, are not employed, but have smart phones and connect to the internet in cafes or other public places. In addition, with regard to the ITU's definition of the target group, there is certainly a large number of people in every country who are under 16 and use the Internet. The 16 year limit can be viewed more as maturity for informational and political media literacy.

1 Proprietary researchnot publicly available.
2 Radenko Udovicic: Vjerodostojnostmedija, teorijskeipraktickedileme (Media Credibility, Theoretical and Practical Dilemmas), Media Plan Institute, Sarajevo 2013.
3 CRA is a national body that regulates all electronic communication in B&H. It is in charge of both the program and technical sectors of radio and TV stations, as well as of only the technical segment of the Internet. In terms of content, there is no regulation of the Internet.
4 http://www.b92.net/tehnopolis/internet.php?yyyy=2016&mm=09&nav_id=1178931
5 According to the latest census from 2013, there are 3,531,159 people living in B&H.

SOCIAL NETWORKS – SELECTIVE INFORMATION

The author of this article, who teaches journalism at a university in Mostar, in discussions with students during lectures received multiple confirmation that they solely gain information through the Internet and that some have never read a newspaper in theirlives! If this is the situation with journalism students, it is not difficult to guess the results at other universities.

The most recent survey whose target group is the young population aged 16 to 27, which is being finalized by Media Initiatives at the time of this writing, empirically shows the dominance of the Internet in obtaining information. More than 50 % of young people said they mostly gain information from news, technical and entertainment sites on the Internet, while 40 %mostly gain information through social networks[6]. This is astonishing information from a communicological standpoint, although it is expected based on current trends, because social networks are an informal, de-professionalized form of communication in which there are no rules on traditional journalistic credibility and thus no accountability. However, even if we accept the aspect of obtaining information through sharing of contents from professional mass media, we come to the aspect of selective and preferential choice, and thus provision of selective information to one's friends and followers on social networks.

However, even though percentages on internet use are high in the country today, out of all countries in the region the smallest number of Facebook users is reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where merely every third citizen uses this social network, according to Vecernji list BiH[7]. Namely, there are 1,401,520 Facebook users in B&H, which is 30.53 % of the total population. Croatia is right next to B&H, with around 1.6 million people using the Facebook social network, or 35.86 % of its citizens. According to a survey carried out by the Center for Market and Public Opinion Research of B&H[8], the prevalent age structure of Facebook users are young people 15 to 24 years of age. It is estimated that out of the total population using Facebook in B&H, around 80 % are young people and only every fifth person is an older person. Young people are more inclined to create a large number of profiles, as well as fake profiles, while older people take that more seriously, so they have one profile and create profiles for their companies.

The latest Facebook data show that[9], among countries in the region, the highest percentage of users of the social network are registered in Serbia, where there are a little over 3.5 million users of Facebook, which is nearly 49 % of citizens of this Balkan country. Right after Serbia is Macedonia, where, according to the latest research, around 48 % of citizens use Facebook, while the percentage for Montenegro is around 46 % of the country's citizens. In Albania, there are around 1.1 million users of the social network, which is around 38 % of the country's total population.

However, despite the somewhat lower percentage of FB profiles than in the rest of the region, Facebook is convincingly the most popular social network in B&H. Twitter has a significantly smaller number of users and those who are active on it are mostly politicians, representatives of the NGO sector, media and various companies who use this network solely for activism and sending political messages and promotions. In the last two years, the popularity of Snapchat has been rising enormously among young people, who are still using it exclusively for informal communication and entertainment, but an increasing number of media who have their feeds on this network is also noticeable.

INFORMATION COCOON

One of the best known B&H bloggers who produces tens of political and social posts on Twitter on a daily basis, Srdjan Puhalo from Banja Luka, says he is not surprised at all by the fact that most media consumers are dominantly turning to the Internet. "Really, the Internet has become a way of life and the easiest way to obtain information, without having to buy and read newspapers and magazines, or even (watch) TV. On the other hand, people are increasingly reading short articles, which inevitably leads to text being depleted of information. In addition, on social networks we are most often surrounded by like-minded people, who create the illusion that everyone around us thinks the same and does not allow different opinion. That is nothing new, but for the first time we have citizens who reduce information, i.e. they only share what they like, not what is accurate. Besides that, social networks with their logarithms select information in line with our interests. Today in the world we have companies that work on publishing inaccurate or semi-accurate information," Srdjan Puhalo said for this report.

6 Survey Mladiistavovi o korupciji (Young People and Views on Corruption), Media Initiatives, Sarajevo 2017
7 http://www.vecernji.ba/na-balkanu-facebook-najmanje-koriste-bh-gradani-1052794
8 Ibid
9 Ibid

A similar opinion is held by a journalism professor at the University of Sarajevo, LejlaTurcilo. "I think a crucial problem related to the use of social networks as sources of information is the phenomenon of 'information cocoon', i.e. enclosing ourselves as users in a circle of limited sources, that is sources with which we agree in advance. In other words, we as users choose the number and quality of those who are on our lists of friends and who are consequently our sources of information. That practically means that we focus on having informers rather than journalists as sources of news, descriptions of events and their interpretations. This considerably redefines our expectations from the media we consult and makes us no longer focus on the credibility and quality of those who are sources, in favor of speed, briefness and simplicity of information we expect on social networks. This certainly affects the way citizens are informed in that it reduces the level of quality of their information," asserts Turcilo.

Vuk Vucetic, lecturer at the Department of Journalism of the University of Istocno Sarajevo, says it is evident that monopoly over information is no longer in the hands of the mass media. "Today it is possible for any individual to be a 'mass medium' that will disseminate content to a large number of recipients. But that does not mean that contents published by individuals via new channels – blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube – are of high quality and credible. We would be more correct to say that the large number of channels has ensured the appearance of so-called fake news – content that has a disinformative character, which can manipulate and deceive the public. The reason for that is that there are generally no official newsrooms on these media platforms which could, conditionally speaking, guarantee the credibility of the disseminated content.

Vucetic says that a considerable number of contents that can be found on the Internet do not have a clearly displayed author. "They are either totally omitted or hide behind a specific nickname. That suggests that there is a lack of accountability on the Internet and therefore requires investing additional effort in verifying the credibility of the big wave of contents that washes against us every day," says Vucetic. In this regard, we can say that it is very clear that there is a danger of disinformation or semi-information that is available online. According to Vucetic, it can often be a result of someone's need for a good joke or parody, but it can also be part of strategic plans aimed at manipulating and confusing the "herd".

Keeping informed in the era of new media is a challenge. It is not easy to find credible information and professional media in the deluge of both professional media communication as well as, to an even greater extent, private communication on social networks and blogs which seriously, as informers, compete with professional media. In this regard, the need for a media literacy concept is evident, which will focus on critical analysis of media content, creating competences of the new media, as well as gaining know-how and skills for creating quality media contents.

CAN ACTIVISM ON SOCIAL NETWORKS BRING CHANGE?

Primarily Twitter and then also Facebook are media which due to their freedom of posting, editing and multimedia character simply urge users toward various forms of activism. This is evident among children too, who criticize school, various phenomena close to them and so on. Among older people, due to a broader range of interests and greater political education, we encounter very harsh discussions on the social, primarily political, reality. The writer of this article last year analyzed 94 posts on his Twitter wall put up by people he follows. Among them, as many as 90 had negative content, while 50 were criticisms of negative phenomena in society. In discussions with friends and co-workers, we reached the conclusion that the situation on their walls is similar. On Facebook, however, the situation is a little different because a large number of users post photographs from family, friendly or work gatherings, although various quick analyses show that, generally speaking, even Facebook has a considerable degree of negative information.

Strategic approaches to alarming, agitating and informing with the goal of (political) change exist on social networks. The best known case is "Arab Spring" (2010-2011), which caused a series of protests, even revolutions, as well as change. Considering that the civil wars that erupted at the time took hundreds of thousands of lives, most of all in Libya and Syria, the end result of progress is debatable. However, it is a fact that these "revolutions" were generated and coordinated on social networks. Technical information shows that most of these calls and information were sent from IP addresses in Western Europe and United States, not from domicile addresses, which shows the activities of the political opposition in the diaspora and, many will say, of western secret services[10]. In B&H, and likely in other Balkan countries as well, this element is not dominant. But there are indicators that in these societies the active minority is dominant on social media, while the silent majority makes decisions in elections and governs. In a conference on media and elections in 2015, organized by Media Plan Institute, numerous journalists

10 Data of Al Jazeera presented at the conference "Journalism and New Media: New Opportunities" in April 2012 in Belgrade.

and other media stakeholders confirmed that if we were to draw conclusions based on the most common posts on social networks, the left opposition would have a convincing victory. However, when we come out of that virtual world, B&H citizens massively vote for conservative right parties. Most media analysts, including practitioners on social networks, are not so convinced of their power.

"As far as activism is concerned, social networks are useful for people to connect, share information and find like-minded people, but they can rarely bring about change in the real world. This means that social networks are merely a tool that should lead to social action. As long as that activism stays only on the net, it is quite harmless and we can say that this is the goal of all governments," says Srdjan Puhalo, one of the biggest critics of government on social networks.

Professor Lejla Turcilo says there are two types of activism on social networks. "One regards what we call like and share activism, which starts and ends with merely sharing information on networks, creating opinions and imposing certain topics and phenomena for discussion in the online space. Quite often, it also serves as a starting point for stories in the classical media, i.e. it influences their agenda. The other is activism that moves from the online world into the offline world, but at least in our context it is not yet concrete political activism, with the exception of the JMBG protests[11]. It is more about humanitarian actions and similar things," says the Sarajevo journalism professor.

Vuk Vucetic from the university in Istocno Sarajevo says that social networks can be a "voltage zone" between the private sphere and public authority, but he believes this potential has not been fully achieved yet. "Social networks are still dominantly used as a playground for entertainment and self-promotion. However, not even government institutions consider social networks a public space yet and thus do not listen carefully to what is happening there. After all, in B&H a very small number of politicians and political institutions are active on social networks, which speaks enough about the attitude to this platform," says Vucetic.

Lejla Turcilo, in an article published on media.ba[12], sees the so-called phenomenon of "experts" as a consequence of activism on the internet. "For the purposes of writing stories, media outlets consult such activists based on their Facebook statuses which collect a large number of likes or based on the fact that they comment daily on the most diverse social events, rather than on the basis of their actual competences. Thus, they reach very quickly and easily not just the pages of news portals, but even primetime slots in mainstream media."

NECESSITY OF EDUCATION

Internet media have violated some journalistic rules that have been in effect since the middle of the 19th century. For example, in the struggle for their advertising share and number of page clicks, so-called 'bait' headlines have become omnipresent. For example, a variation of that is the headline: "Shocking!: What did Ibrahimovic do?" According to the rules of journalism, the headline would be: "Ibrahimovic showed middle finger to Arsenal fans". Therefore, we do not have an answer to the three questions required for a professional headline, only getting it in the article itself, which is inadmissible in the classical journalistic sense. Such web pages are especially present on social networks where they are shared or (paid) suggested posts and have become an unavoidable part of Facebook information.

We asked our collocutors from universities how these changes should be addressed in education. Vuk Vucetic says it is difficult to deal with the wave of tabloidization and sensationalism that has overtaken not only journalism, but society as a whole. "Sensationalism brings profit and that is the main existential motive for the operation of media. A way to change things is certainly to invest in education of young journalists who will slowly change existing patterns and standards. Besides that, it is necessary to work strategically and systematically on media literacy of the public and reasonable building of true informational needs. Only a mature and media-literate public will demand responsible and professional conduct from the media. Nevertheless, from this viewpoint that is a utopian projection," said Vucetic.

11 Protests from 2013 when citizens blocked the B&H Parliament and demanded that the Law on Single Identification Numbers of Citizens (JMBG) be passed. Due to disagreements in parliament, new-born children were unable to get this number, which is the basis for medical insurance and receiving any type of identification documents.

12 Turcilo: Online portali u BiH: Vjerodostojnostnakušnji (Online Portals in B&H: Credibility Put to the Test) http://media.ba/bs/mediametar/online-portali-u-bih-vjerodostojnost-na-kusnji

Lejla Turcilo says that media contents are increasingly aimed at attracting attention and 'forcing' the public to click on a particular content, rather than at providing quality information to citizens. "One may conclude that the functions of media in the online space are being increasingly subjected to commercial and market demands, and thus entertainment has suppressed information, the trivial has become more important than the serious, and speculation and incomplete information have become more important than the verified and investigative journalistic process. In such media practice, news is no longer information; it has become a construction, a designed product which is supposed to provoke certain emotional reactions," says Turcilo.

The Sarajevo professor emphasizes that in terms of education, we must constantly remind of the principles of credibility of media and social accountability of journalists. "Form must not threaten content. Good, high quality journalism is the essence of the profession and it will always find and have its public both offline and online," maintains Turcilo.

The Media Initiatives organization in its analysis of media literacy in B&H[13] produced recommendations covering online public and private spheres of information. Internet portals of the most popular media outlets have become a place where hate speech is used openly, which is especially dangerous in B&H which has not yet healed the wounds of war. Therefore, in consultation with the professional public, two recommendations were made, the first of which is already regularly practiced in most countries (but unfortunately not yet in B&H):

- Editorial boards of online media should introduce administration of reader comments, which would only be related to elimination of hate speech and extremely vulgar communication.
- Media organizations through projects, or the Communications Regulatory Agency as a national body, should establish a system for reporting internet contents that call for crimes or generate hate. This primarily regards informal communication on the internet, mostly through blogs, private websites or social networks.

The third recommendation concerns the youngest categories:

- In upper classes of elementary school, as a compulsory category within language classes, lectures should be given on the topic of culture of communication on social networks.

The media, educational and political spheres in B&H have no doubt that it is essential to act in these directions. However, the state, shackled by efforts to protect its basic existence and torn apart by ethnic and political conflicts, cannot take a step forward and develop systemic and content elements of Media Literacy related to digital media and their content.

13 Media Literacy and Education needs of journalists and the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina TWO SIDES OF THE MEDIA MEDAL

MACEDONIA

WHOSE MEDIA ARE THESE?

Zoran Richliev, digital media analyst
Macedonian Institute for Media

As recent developments with digital news show, the quantity of information is inversely proportional to its quality.

The abundance of information which became apparent with the fast digital development, viewed from Macedonian point of view has not led to better democracy, as it was common to think when digital media appeared, but towards total control and distortion of the news agenda. Especially after the recent developments with fake news, and do not forget the vast majority of so called fake news sites for the controversial Trump presidential campaign originated from Veles, a town in central FYRoMacedonia[1].

Digital media transformed the audience into author and curator of content, minimizing the role of the legacy media, editors and journalists in creating the public news agenda. This helped some independent media get the reach they deserved,but enabled various ways of control and distortion of the public discourse, and due to the fast development of the digital platforms created various ethical and legal problems.

In young democracies, such as Macedonia, these problems are more obvious and have more devastating consequences than in societies where democratic tradition, ethical standards and check and balance systems are stronger and play the role of gatekeepers that keep misinformation at bay.

MEDIA NOT-FREEDOM

The state of media freedom in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedoniain the last 8 years has deteriorated rapidly. From 34-th place in the world in 2009 we found ourselves on the 123 place in the 2014 ranking of the Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders. At present FYROM is ranked 118[2].

Blurry media legislation that came into power in the recent years added fuel to media devastation. The lack of updated media legislation[3] that was present at the beginning of the decade turned into overregulation, with totally ignoring the existence of online media.

The new Law on Civil Liability for Defamation, for example, provides special treatment for journalists and media and sets limits to the amounts of compensations/fines that they may be ordered to pay. Even with such limits, which are set at amounts that are rather insignificant for Western standards (2000 euro for the journalist, up to 10.000 for the editor, and up to 15.000 euro for the publisher/owner) that do not differ between small and big media, between influential and marginal, for some independent media can be fatal.

Defamation was removed from the criminal code in 2012 but prosecutions have been replaced by civil actions with the possibility of heavy fines for reporters and media owners. At least 580 defamation suits have been brought since the end of 2014, several dozen of them against journalists. As a result, more than half of Macedonia's journalists say they censor themselves[4].

The new Macedonian media legislation has created another issue: media owners are subject to fines in case of defamation suits. By posing the biggest fines on the owners, the law automatically encourages owners to intervene into editorial policy of their media, since huge possible fine for them automatically places them responsible for the content.

1 BuzzFeed: How Teens In The Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters With Fake Newshttps://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo?utm_term=.rakjRWGXrL#.iuP471ANOo accessed March 2017
2 2016 World Press Freedom Index https://rsf.org/en/ranking accessed March 2017
3 Digital Media Mapping Macedonia, 2012 https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/mapping-digital-media-macedonia
4 Reporters without Borders Macedonia report https://rsf.org/en/macedonia accessed March 2017

According to Freedom House, Macedonian mediais “not free” since its media landscape is deeply polarized along political lines; the same opinion is shared bythe 2016 IREX Media Sustainability Report, which states that: The prolonged political crisis has fortified the existing divisions in Macedonia’s media sector, primarily along political lines, into pro-government and critical/ independent/pro-opposition media.

Self-censorship among journalists is common, due primarily to pressure from media owners with particular business or political interests and, and more recently, concerns about surveillance. Journalists are poorly paid and face threats and harassment for engaging in investigative or critical reporting[5].

MAINSTREAM MEDIA ASTRAY

Wiretapped recordings released by the opposition in 2015 appeared to reveal conversations between high-level government officials and the editorial staff of major television station sindicating that the government was directly influencing editorial policies.

Media integrity is under constant attacks by influential business and political elites, especially from those being in constant power in the last 10 years. The role of the editors is minimized, following the huge harvest of editors in the last years. More than 50 editors of major media outlets were changed recently.[6] There is almost no mainstream media that is still run by the same editor from 5 years ago.

A comparison between the role and the integrity of the editors “then and now”, inevitably leads to the distorted image of editors that prevails nowadays. It stems from the absolutely forgotten role of the media as a promoter and protector of the public interest[7].

The new editors are usually young or previously unknown to the media professionals, and their role is primarily to maintain a channel of communication from the political elite to the audience (voters) rather than to inform the public truthfully and independently.

MEDIA OWNERS AS LEVERS OF NEWS CONTROL

Media ownership is a problem in Macedonia, especially in case of the online media.

The majority of most influential print and broadcast media outlets are part of bigger corporations with diverse portfolios, for which broadcasting or publishing is not the core business. That situation has detrimental effect on the editorial independence of their media, which are used primarily in support of their main businesses.

Panelists who participated in the 2016 Media sustainability index in FYROM commented that “the government skillfully uses that situation through the distribution of public tenders and deals for public works, to basically buy the services of the media owned by big corporations”[8].

The analysis of the media policy development and implementation in the country evidently shows that the last two and a half decades have seen retrograde processes in terms of freedom of expression and media independence. Although during the first decade and a half the concept of public interest was widely articulated in the regulation and the media sphere was far more plural and liberal, this initial period was nevertheless marked by the influence of the strong media moguls protecting journalists and the media only when their interests were at stake. The salient feature of the second period of the media system development is a gradual conquest of the entire media space by the ruling party. Using the powerful mechanisms of the state apparatus, the party in power put under its own umbrella all business moguls, especially the ones in possession of influential media outlets. Ever since its establishment, the regulatory authority had been the target of attempts at political influence, but after 2006

5 Macedonia: Freedom of the Press 2016 https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/macedonia accessed March 2017

6 META: Rich journalistic and editorial harvest: How did freedom fall? http://meta.mk/en/bogata-novinarska-i-urednichka-zhetva-kako-pagashe-slobodata/ accessed March 2017

7 Editors in Macedonia: Under threat and political pressurehttp://mediaobservatory.net/radar/editors-macedonia-under-threat-and-political-pressure accessed March 2017

8 IREX: Macedonia Media Sustainability Index 2016 https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2016-macedonia.pdf.pdf

resistance to such influence completely broke. Finally, all that had a disastrous effect on the media independence and the journalism profession[9].

THE RISK IN NUMBERS

In the 19th century it can be said that the media was paid by the audience, since everybody who wanted access to a newspaper had to pay for it, and thus he financed journalists to find and reveal useful information for him. In the same time, by asking questions, journalism was comfortable in its role of a watchdog of the authorities in the name of the audience.

In 20th century advertising became more important and media was not so dependent on direct audience's money, since a large portion of the media finances came from adverts, but still the media held to their role of watchdogs. They were "selling" the trust audience had in them to the advertisers.

Now, since there is abundance of free information the professional media with their expensive apparatus found themselves in crisis, globally. In FYROM this crisis is even more significant, since the market is small and there is a huge number of media outlets, which fragments the market and makes media small and weak to financial and political pressures.

The media scene is oversaturated with hundreds of media outlets - there are over 130 broadcast media alone. There are also half a dozen dailies, a handful of weekly newspapers, and more than 100 online news sites for a population of 2 million people.

The abundance of media outlets does not necessarily mean a great diversity of news reporting. On the contrary, media – mostly pro-governmental and especially during the ongoing political crisis - often carry absolutely identical reports, so that suspicions abound that much of their political coverage is written in one center and then distributed for publication. In addition to oversaturation, the media scene is deeply divided along political lines, usually presenting just one side of the story. In order to gain the full picture of an event, or gather the positions one is forced to consult several news sources from both sides of the political divide, and across several sources.

There are several broadcasters that originally broadcast in Albanian, but also produce bilingual programming and news that are more objective and impartial, because they are both caught in the political battle that is fought mainly by Macedonian political parties.

Macedonian media market is essentially unsustainable. Nobody measures the size of the advertising market systematically, but according to industry insiders, all these media outlets fight for a total available advertising estimated between $22 and approximately $40 million. Estimates of government advertising vary from a quarter to a third of the total available advertising revenue, which exerts pressure on the media to adopt pro-government editorial policies.

Television still attracts the over 60 percent of the total available advertising, with rapid growth of digital advertising, which is now assessed to account for about 10 percent of the total advertising market.

In June 2015, during the negotiations mediated by the international community on the necessary reforms in the media sector, the government announced a moratorium on all government advertising, but the moratorium does not include public enterprises and other public institutions with significant promotional budgets, or the municipal administrations. It mostly directs its advertising and promotion budgets towards friendly media, buying their loyalty and favourable editorial policies.

Print media is in constant rapid decline. The biggest print publisher Media Print Macedonia is in huge crisis which could result in total collapse, leaving hundreds of journalists jobless. That - besides being a huge social drama - could affect the workforce market producing inflation of workforce, which could make the already extremely low salaries of the journalists even lower.

News portals and social networks step in to fill the gap. The audience is hungry for information on the complicated political crisis, which has been developing sinceDecember 2012, when, on the so called Black Monday, the opposition MPs and journalists were forcefully thrown out of the Parliament; the protests exploded in 2015 and, despite the Przino agreement[10], have continued.

9 Media integrity matters " SEE Media Observatory http://mediaobservatory.net/sites/default/files/media%20integrity%20matters_za%20web_1.pdf

10 Przino Political Agreement http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia/press_corner/all_news/news/2016/2016-07-20_agreement_en.htm, accessed March 2017

Now, more than ever, things are moving intoa dangerous direction interfering with ethnical tensions, besides the political ones[11].

The explosion of online media - emerging in the market thanks to an inexpensive platform that begun a decade ago - has slowed down. Hence, the most visited news aggregator still aggregates news from 120+ online media (including websites of broadcasters and newspapers), only in the Macedonian language. More than 40 Albanian language online media are also available on its Albanian edition.

Since the online advertising market share is still insignificant, one cannot help wondering how these media outlets are financed and whether they are really media or just copy/paste platforms for content generated from a unique source.

TV RULES, DIGITAL MEDIA FOLLOW

The surveys show that television is still the most influential media in terms of news consumption (90 %), but the Internet as a news distribution channel is on rapid rise (from 19 % in December 2014 to 37 % in April 2016).
Friends and family are considered a primary source of information by a large percentage of the audience. This number is also on the rise from 15 % in 2014 to 30% in 2016, according to IRI survey[12]. Social networks as a communication tool must also be taken into account.
That is important especially when it comes to the age of the users: youth turn to the Internet for information, while older people prefer the television.
According to the Survey of the 2014 Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services, 91,8% of the audience aged 16 - 19, and 80% of the adults aged 20-29 use social networks on a daily basis.
On the other hand, the vast majority of the audience aged 16 - 49 watch TV for 2 to 4 hours daily, while adults over 50 watch TV more than 4 hours daily[13].
In the first quarter of 2016, 72% of people aged 16 - 74 accessed the Internet, 61 % of them on a daily basis. Four out of ten used mobile Internet on smartphone devices; when it comes to youth aged 15-24, the figure exceeds 90%[14].
According to MARNet (Macedonian Domain Register) there are more than 26 thousand registered domains in Macedonia[15].
There is no specific survey on the use of the social networks as a source of information but conclusions can be drawn based on other surveys and reports, which show a rise, especially in terms of mobile platforms.
It is to be noted that social networks must be perceived as a channel, not as a subject in the public communication[16]. Therefore they cannot be a source of information, but only a platform and channel for the distribution of the content produced both by users, and the media.

ONLINE MEDIA: OUTLETS AS OUTLAWS

Online media are exempted from the Media Law, including the obligations regarding transparency. As a result, some prominent online news-sites are owned by shell companies registered in known off shore tax havens, with suspicions that the actual owners are Macedonian citizens, including some prominent political figures and holders of public offices.
Increasingly, there are concerns over the proliferation of online media that create havoc in the market, with various voices proposing that they, too, should enter some form of registration process.
Online journalists may find themselves at greater risk because online media are not explicitly mentioned in the definition of media as stipulated by the Media Law. Sadly this has prompted some judges to deny them the protection that the defamation law provides for journalists and media, for instance, as far as the limit of the fines is concerned.

11 ErwanFouere: Gruevski's Party has Left Macedonia in Limbohttp://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/gruevski-s-party-has-left-macedonia-in-limbo-03-20-2017
12 2016 Survey of public opinion in Macedonia by International Republican Institute http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri_macedonia_survey_april_2016_0.pdf accessed March 2017
13 Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services audience poll (MK) http://www.avmu.mk/images/Istrazuvanje_na_mislenjeto_na_publikata_za_radio_i_TV_programite_2014_godina.pdf accessed March 2017
14 Usage of information and communication technologies in households – State statistical office http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2016/8.1.16.30.pdfaccessed March 2017
15 http://marnet.mk/domeni/operacii-so-domeni/statistika/ accessed March 2017
16 Interview with EmilijaPetreskaKamenjarova Communication expert from Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services

Online media is in a state of Eldorado. It is hard for a regular visitor to determine what is true, what is not[17]. This status is widely used by political options to create and publish completely false news, which later on are endlessly quoted by other similar media close to the same political option until the real source is hard, or even impossible to locate. Considering that digital media literacy is low, especially among the elderly population, the options for manipulation are endless.
There is a huge number of such partisan, extremely biased media outlets, sometimes not because they want it, but because they have no choice as there is little financial independence. They chose sides, in order to survive the battle they are caught in. Some of these media are used to publicly slam politicians and activists, but the court practice is that the online media in FYROM cannot be sued, especially if the owner is unknown, because they are not considered media under the current Media Law.

ALGORITHMS REPLACE MEDIA AND EDITORS

A significant percentage of the audience trusts and consumes only one media outlet, but s large percentage of the surveyed say that they check the information fromseveral sources because they do not trust the media.

Macedonian online media sphere has one very important characteristic, which is not so common elsewhere: News aggregators, especially the most visited Time.mk, are the default landing page for news consumption. Time.mk publishes their Google Analytics reports on their website[18] and they show numbers of 7 million visits, almost 18 million pageviews by 600.000 unique visitors monthly, which make it by far the most visited news platform in the country.

This fact helps audience to compare various new sources, but in the same time, it distorts the news agenda by using algorithms to position the content without a human reasoning behind. Algorithms usually rank better the news clusters that have more sources or keywords on the same subject. Thus the more media cover an event, the more important this topic appears. That can be misused for propaganda purposes since the clusters of media that are close to some center, for example to a political party, or simply copy paste the same content among them, appear more influential.

The Time.mk aggregator, as Google news, has algorithms to tackle such attempts, but they, as human intervention is not present, sometimes can be avoided.

There is the possibility of creating aggregators from powerful political and economic groups with the sole intention of distorting the news agenda, since the algorithm can be tweaked in favor of certain media. Few were made, but they did not come close to Time.mk figures.
Facebook is a specific social aggregator, as well.

CAUGHT IN THE SOCIAL "NETS"

Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in Macedonia. At the present there are more than 1,000,000 Facebook users[19].
Though significantly smaller, Twitter preserves its specificity: it is very active and socially and politically engaged. In the last several months after the elections on December 11, 2016, it is to be noted that this platform gained many new users, while the old ones suddenly became very active[20]. A quick analysis shows that many users defend the political option in power since 2006, especially the nationalist political party VMRO-DPMNE. This shows an organized attempt to flood the social networks with support for this political option.
Hence, only 2.5 percent of the Macedonians say that they have published their opinions on political or citizen aspects on social networks, which is very small for a real e-democracy.
As for the foreign diplomats[21], politicians use Facebook and Twitter to publish and promote attitudes more frequently.

17 Balkan Insight: Macedonia Ruling Party Smears Rivals Using Fake News Sites http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/fake-news-sites-used-in-macedonia-campaign-11-25-2016
18 Time.mk Aggregator visits overview http://www.time.mk/info/marketing
19 http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm accessed March 2017
20 Interview with DarkoBuldioski, Digital Media Consultant
21 British ambassador Charles Garret blog: Five Thoughts on Diplomatic Tweeting in Macedonia https://blogs.fco.gov.uk/fcoeditorial/2017/02/06/five-thoughts-on-diplomatic-tweeting-in-macedonia/

Special Prosecutors Office uses Facebook to announce their press conferences, also. Noteworthy, that this is a one-way communication. Local politicians rarely engage in discussions with the other users. On the other hand with every political option having hundreds of trolls it is almost impossible to have a decent debate.

Trolls have been especially active on the timelines of foreign diplomats and ambassadors, in the last few months. They became increasingly active after former Prime minister and president of VMRO-DPMNE addressed the protesters in front of the State Electoral Commission in December 2016, saying that his party would not tolerate foreign interference into Macedonian internal matters. After that, controversial fake obituaries of foreign ambassadors and diplomats appeared on the social networks.[22] VMRO DPMNE, the ruling party at the time, condemned the incident[23], but its supporters continued the smear campaign against foreign diplomats, especially on social networks.

Hate speech is becoming more common on social networks as nationalistic rhetoric is used more actively, fueled by the partisan media[24].

Recently more intense organized activity is evident on Social networks (Facebook and Twitter) similar to what Fuchs[25] addresses as "colonization of the social networks".

Imagine that a Facebook group is created from a political party; imagine that all the supporters receive a message to join; imagine that the group gains more than 20.000 followers in one day; imagine a link with fake news is shared to the group; imagine that all the group members share the same link on their timelines; imagine the vast majority gives a like to the same link the other members shared... add a little ad campaign and mix it with some fake profiles...

This confuses the regular Facebook user – moreover, this confuses the Facebook algorithms, which by default promote viral content.

Suddenly, something becomes newsworthy just because everybody is talking about it. It is not news, it is a construct, and it is the fake news dissemination concept in its essence. Imagine there are many such Facebook groups.

It is possible, and it is probably happening. Here, now in Macedonia.

It is very hard to tackle such massive actions. These actions are not illegal, they are unethical. Fighting that should not be unethical, that is why it is hard. Solution?

DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY AND MEDIA INTEGRITY

The popular subject of the Fake news did one good thing. It raised the awareness of the audience that not everything they receive as information on digital platforms is true.

Media literacy should become an important part of the educational cycle, as well asa public awareness campaign. Media as most concerned party should play their role raising audience awareness, because their task is not only to inform and entertain, but to educate.

Now more than ever the media integrity is becoming important. Audience seeks entities they can trust, a media outlet that they can believe without performing fact-checking.

This is a great chance for the real and professional media. They just have to survive the crisis without making compromises with the truth. And that obviously is the hardest thing.

22 https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/03/01/osceodihr-post-election-period-in-macedonia-was-tense-and-full-of-harsh-rhetoric/ accessed March 2017

23 Meta: VMRO-DPMNE is condemning the publishing of posthumous photographs of foreign ambassadors in Macedonia on the Internet http://meta.mk/en/vmro-dpmne-is-condemning-the-publishing-of-posthumous-photographs-of-foreign-ambassadors-in-macedonia-on-the-internet/ accessed March 2017

24 Balkan Insight: Pro-Govt Media Inflame Nationalist Hysteria in Macedonia http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-s-propaganda-war-spreads-nationalist-hysteria-03-15-2017 accessed March 2017

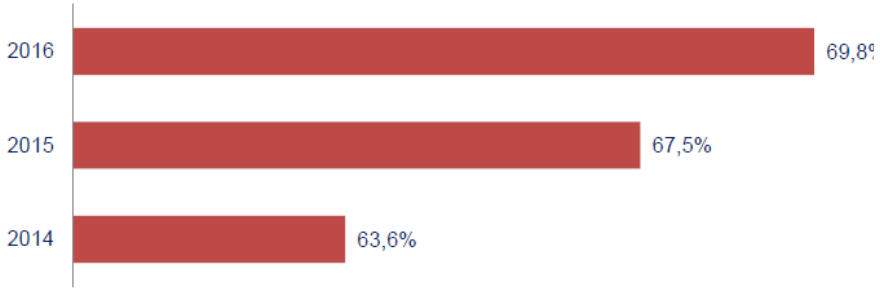
25 http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/552

SOCIAL NETWORKS VS. TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN MONTENEGRO: THE BATTLE HAS STARTED

Milena Perovac-Korac,
Montenegro Media Institute

There is an increasing number of people using social networks as an information source in Montenegro, but also as a media channel. Individuals and groups who do not have access to traditional media use social networks, especially Facebook, for sending messages to the general public. More and more politicians and government critics use social networks as a means for expressing their opinions.

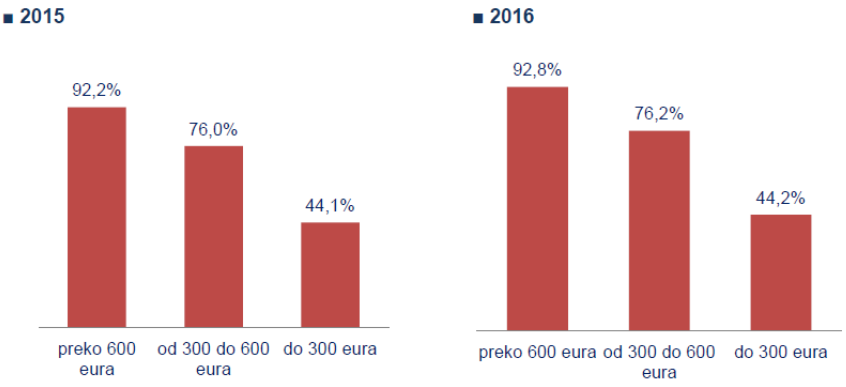
According to the Ministry of Information Society and Technology of Montenegro[1], the number of people and households who have Internet access increased by 2,3 % in 2016, compared to 2015 (69,8% in 2016 compared to only 67,5% in 2015), while in 2014 the figure reached only 63,6%



Noteworthy that more and more people use mobile phones to access the Internet Compared to 2014, the number of households that access the Internet via mobile devices has increased by 16,7% in 2016.

Uređaji u domaćinstvu	2014	2015	2016
Personalni računar (PC)	75,1	74,1	68,9
Laptop	57,6	56,4	58,4
Mobilni uređaji	38,5	46,9	55,2

According to official state statistics, there is a connection between the Internet usage and the level of income. For example, in 2016, 92,2% of the households with monthly earnings over 600 euros had Internet acces, compared to only 44,2% of the households with an income under 300 euros per month.



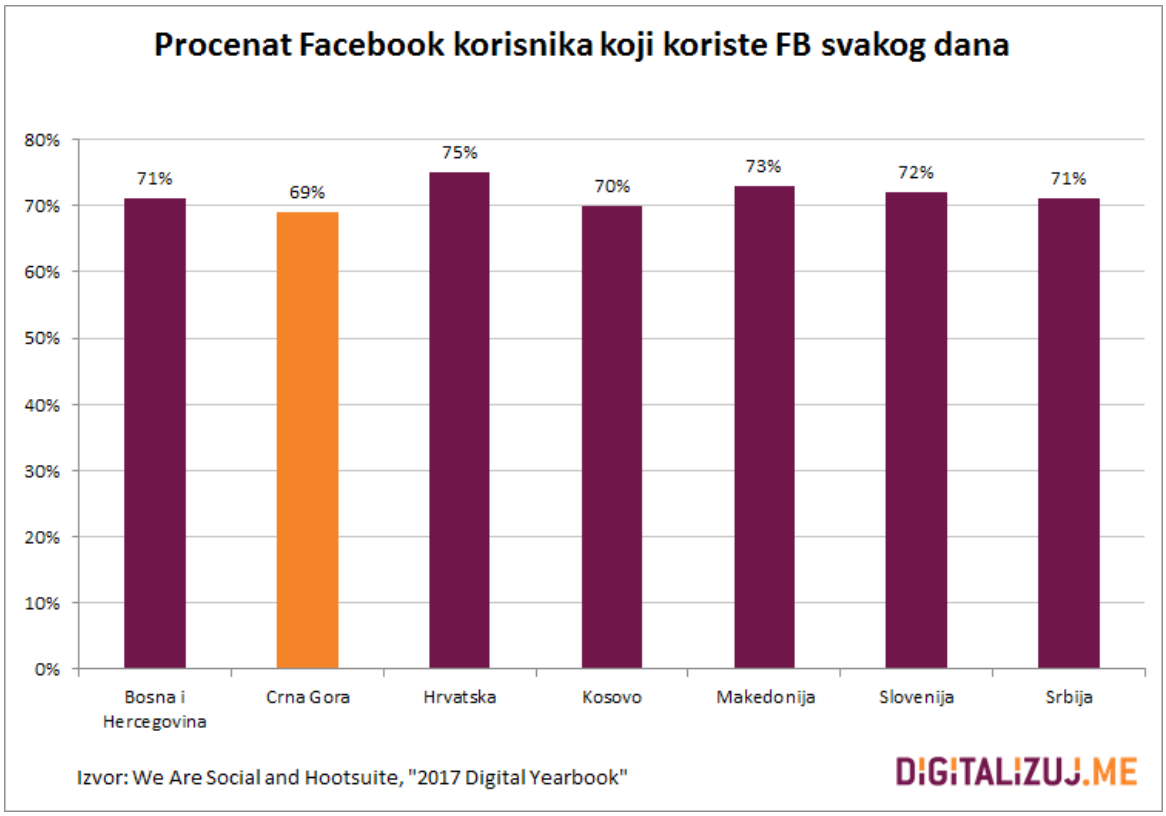
1 http://www.mid.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=257306&rType=2

Official data for 2016 also show that it is mostly young people that use the Internet daily and more men (87,2%) than women (84%) use the Internet daily.

It is interesting that most households access the Internet to spend time on social networks (79,7 %), read newspapers (76,4 %), use viber or skype (75,2%) and send emails (67,3%). It is clear that more people use Internet for social networks than traditional media.



As indicated by *We are social and Hootsuite 2017 Digital Yearbook*, Montenegro has 350.000 users of social networks, which is the biggest social networks penetration rate in the region.[2]



Many traditional media in Montenegro have their Facebook profiles, used not only to publish their content, but also to communicate with their audience. In some cases it is the social media (Facebook) that includes a topic or an event on the public agenda, even when it is ignored by the "traditional media".

For example, a group of citizens, called Za nas, has protested in front of the Montenegro Parliament for more than three months now. The traditional media has not shown much interest in covering their activities and protest, so they used Facebook for promoting their ideas and fight.

2 https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/2017-digital-yearbook

„Facebook gave us a great opportunity to communicate with the public and present them our ideas", Velibor Ivanovic, a member of Za nas, declared for this report. „ At the same time FB is faster than the traditional media".

More and more politicians and political parties use their FB or Twitter accounts to express their opinions, especially in when they believe that they do not have enough space in the traditional media.

One of them is Nebojsa Medojevic, the leader of oposition party Pokret za promjene (PZP). For many years he has been using Facebook to express his political opinion; starting this year he has been using Facebook live option to hold weekly online conferences. As one of the opposition leaders and critics of the regime, Nebojsa Medojevic has failed to get any broadcast space on PBC for about two years.

"The Democratic front and PzP are somehow isolated by the pro- governmental media, as well by some other private media outlets in the country. That is why we started to use social networks, especially Facebook to communicate with the citizens. I have used Facebook since 2008; I have 6400 followers on Twitter. The Facebook account of PzP, my party, is followed by 10000 people"[3], Medojevic declared for this report. "For two months I have used Facebook live chat weekly, which is followed by 10.000 people. Facebook is the new global media"

"Whistleblowers" have also expressed their accusations on social media. For example, several years ago, Predrag Vucinic, ex police inspector, accused police officials of corruption and connections with mafia bosses on his Facebook. Then the traditional media started to investigate his accusations, and report about his case.

Dragan Lucic[4], tehnical editor and administrator of weekly Monitor thinks that social networks are winning battle with the traditional media: more and more people use networks instead of the traditional media to find information. „For example, the statistics of the Monitor Facebook account is better than the website's. People also like the fact that Facebook is more interactive, they can chat about and comment in real time there".

On the other hand there are opinions that social networks are used only by part of the public in Montenegro: the educated, young people. For example some of the largest media in Montenegro, as daily Dan, do not have a Facebook account and portal, but still have the same audience.

One thing is sure: the battle has started.

3 Interview for this report
4 Interview

NEW MEDIA IN SERBIA: A REALM OF FREEDOM OR A PANDORA'S BOX?

Tatjana Djukic,
Media and Reform Center Nis

INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the use of social networks, modern and technologically advanced means of communication in developing countries such as Serbia, is a real challenge. It should always be kept in mind that there are two groups of users who use social networks differently, which has different effects on them. One group instrumentalizes social networks, while another group is often instrumentalized, as a subject of manipulation.

Most users do not find the privacy policy important, which is closely related to the low level of media literacy in Serbia. Media illiterate audience is also a reason large amounts of false news are being published, reality-show information, tabloid comments and similar, to the benefit of those who want to limit critical thinking.

However, social networks in Serbia, compared to traditional, are an oasis of free speech and the place for expressing opinions. There is a growing number of users; a presence of traditional media, which has not yet been sufficiently adapted to social channels; more and more public figures, and an increasing number of politicians who use social networks; as well as more and more government critics from different spheres of society.

STATISTICS ON COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE IN SERBIA

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia[1] on the use of ICT in 2015, 64.4% have a computer, 63.8% have an Internet connection, and 56% have Broadband Internet. In 2016 there was an increase of 1.4% compared to 2015 and 2.6% in comparison to 2014, as 65.8% of households owns a computer.

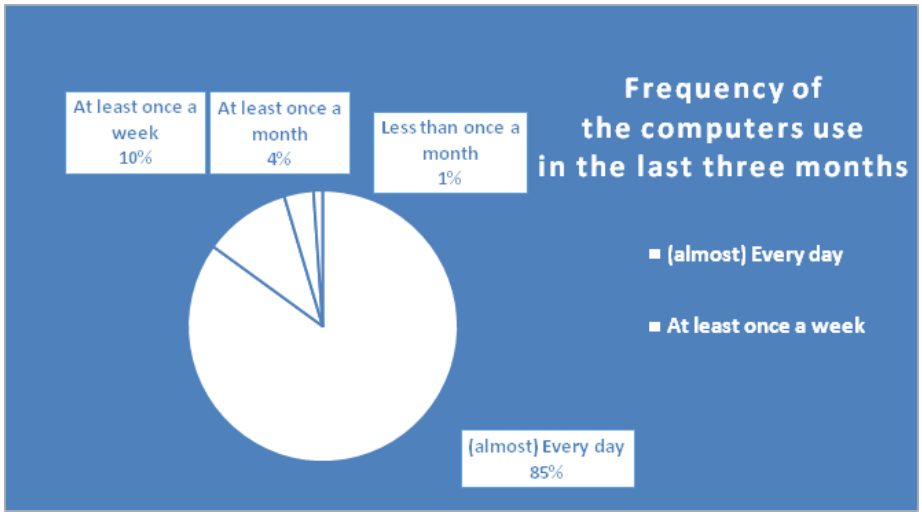
YEAR	PC	INTERNET	BROADBAND INTERNET
2010	50.4%	39.0%	27.6%
2011	52.1%	41.2%	31.0%
2012	55.2%	47.5%	38.0%
2013	59.9%	55.8%	43.4%
2014	63.2%	62.8%	55.1%
2015	64.4%	63.8%	56.0%

Table 1: Households in Serbia having a computer (PC), Internet and broadband Internet connection

Research[2] from the 2016 shows that the differences can be seen when comparing the use of computers in urban (73.3%) and rural areas (54%) of Serbia. Compared to 2015, the gap has slightly increased, due to the growth rate of computers in urban and rural parts of Serbia. In urban areas of Serbia the growth rate is 2.2%, while in the rural part of Serbia is 0,1%, in comparison to 2015.

In Serbia, 67.2% used a computer in the last three months, 0.9% did not use a computer in the last three months, but they did use it in thepast twelve months, and 4.7% of people used a computer more than a year ago. **27.2% of respondents have never used a computer**. The number of computer users in Serbia increased by 1.5% in comparison to 2015. 87.1% of people with higher education in Serbia use a computer, 77.6% of people with secondary education and 37.6% of people with primary school education. In terms of frequency, on average, they have used a computer in the last three months, 85.1% of respondents said they had used it every day or almost every day, 10.4% at least once a week, 3.5% at least once a month, 1.1% less than once a month.

1 Source: http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/29/10/17_Informacione_tehnologije.pdfvisited: 13.03.2017.
2 Source: http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/86/IKT__2016_pres_s.pdfvisited: 13.03.2017.



Graphic 1: Frequency of the computer use in the last three months

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia there is a 1.4% **increase in the number of Internet users** in comparison to 2015, by 3.9% in comparison to 2014, and by 12.3% compared to 2013.In addition, 64.7% of households have Internet access, which is an increase of 0.9% in comparison to 2015 and of 1.9% in comparison to 2014.

INTERNET USERS IN SERBIA (2016)	PENETRATION (% OF POPULATION)	POPULATION (2016)	NON-USERS (INTERNET LESS)
4,758,861	**54%**	**8,812,705**	**4,053,844**

Table 2: Internet Users in Serbia, 2016[3]

Most households with a monthly income of over 600 euros (94.7%) have an Internet connection, while the share of households with income up to 300 euros is only 46.1%.
In Serbia the three most common reasonsthat people use the Internet for are: reading online newspapers and magazines, searching for information about goods and services and for **social network usage**, as illustrated in the table 3.

1.	Reading online newspapers and magazines	77.4%
2.	Searching for information about goods and services	71.3%
3.	**Social network usage (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs)**	68.7%

Table 3:Types of Internet usage for private purposes in the last three months[4]

STATISTICS ON SOCIAL NETWORK USERS IN SERBIA

*Data from 2016	Age						Gender	
	16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	male	female
Social network users (Facebook, Twitter)	**90.3%**	79.1%	67.1%	51.5%	53.1%	33.1%	70.1%	67.2%

*Data from 2016	Level of education		
	Lower than secondary	Secondary	High and higher education
Social network users (Facebook, Twitter)	55.8 %	60.0%	63.7%

3 Source: http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/ Visited: 13.02.2017
4 Source: http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/86/IKT__2016_pres_s.pdf Visited: 13.03.2017

*Data from 2016	Employment Status			
	Employed	Unemployed	Student	Other
Social network users (Facebook, Twitter)	62.5%	55.9%	79.6%	56.5%

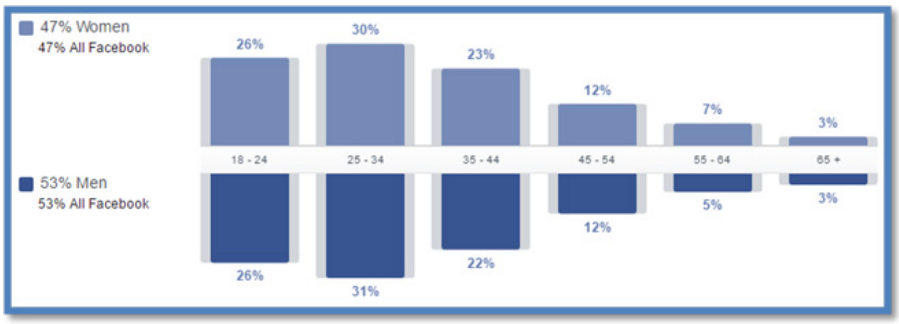
Table 4: The demographics of social network users in Serbia 2016[5]

The very important result of this research is that **90.3% of the Internet users in Serbia age 16 to 24 have an account on social networks** such as Facebook and Twitter.

The demographics of Facebook users in Serbia in 2016

Facebook users from Serbia	
Women	47%
Men	53%

Table 5: Genderof Facebook users from Serbia[6]



Graphic 2: Age and Gender of Facebook users in Serbia

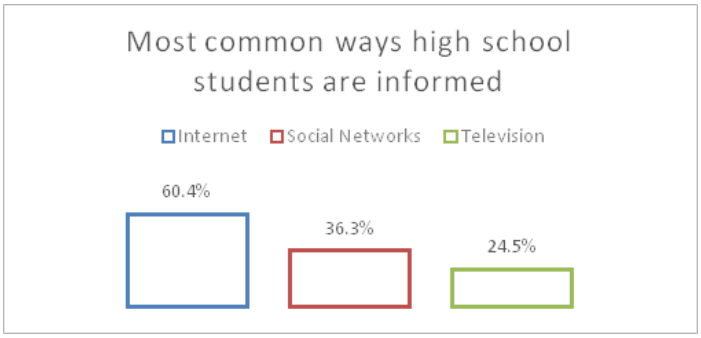
Serbian Pages with Largest Facebook Audience	
Novak Djokovic	7 235 189 fans
Ana Ivanovic	3 311 737 fans
NAXI RADIO 96,9MHz – Beograd	1 145 850 fans

Table 6: Serbian Pages with Largest Facebook Audience

STATISTICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The research7 conducted by The Bureau of Social Research (BIRODI) shows that only 7.4% of surveyed high school students do not use Facebook, and 5.1% do not use social networks at all. Most high school students use Facebook, Instagram, Google+ and Twitter. A small number of them use Tumblr, Last.fm, Pinterest etc. Most high school users (34.8%) spend one or two hours a day on social media, 25.6% spend 2-4 hours, 23.5% less than one hour, and 15.8% spend more than 4 hours. 57.1% of the respondents who use Facebook, have more than 7 "friends" who they do not know personally. Slightly less than one-fifth does not have such a "friend" at all. The largest number of high school students are usually informed via Internet (60.4%). 36.3% is usually informed through social networks, and 24.5% via television. This group rarely get their information from weekly magazines and radio, as illustrated.

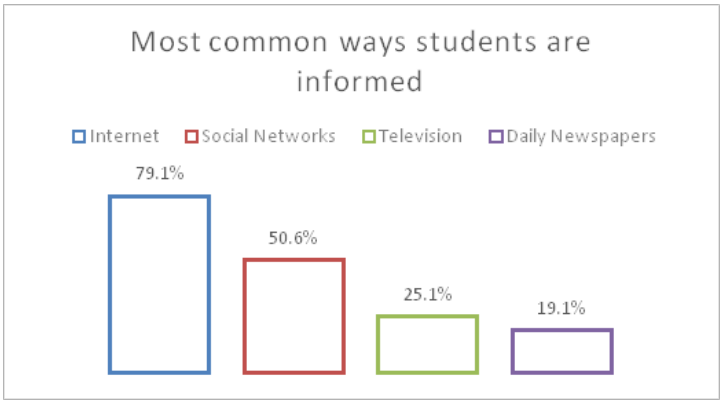
5 Source: http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/89/ICT2016s.pdf Visited: 13.02.2017
6 Source: https://www.facebook.com/sds/audience-insights Visited: 13.03.2017.
7 Source: http://www.birodi.rs/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Medijska-pismenost-u-Srbiji-rezultati-istra%C5%BEivanja.pdf visited: 13.03.2017.



Graphic 3: Most common ways high school students are informed

STATISTICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

When asked to define the new media, university students gavethe following answers: 53.8% think that the new media is Internet as a whole, 41.3% think that it is an online version of the traditional media, and 37% of the surveyed students think that new media are blogs. Nearly 30% of students equate new media with social networks, and 23.7% with all the news that can be found on the Internet. 43.9% of university students use Twitter, 32.7% Instagram, Google + 30.1%, 12.1% LinkedIn. **9.2% of the surveyed students do not use social networks**, and **only 4.9% of students do not use Facebook**. Nearly one-third of the students post on social networks several times a week, 24.6% several times a day, and approximately one-fifth of students does it several times a month. **Nearly 80% of surveyed students use social media to follow the development of an event, as the source of information.** 71.6% use them for private messaging. A one-third of surveyed students use social networks to express opinions on relevant social topics. Students are mostly informed through the Internet and social networks. 79.1% of them said they are usually informed through the Internet, 50.6% through social networks, 25.1% via television. **Only 19.1% read daily newspapers.**



Graphic 4: Most common ways students are informed

Largest number of journalism students (47.7%) is informed through new media, 33.9% follow both new and traditional media, while only **1.1% gets information exclusively from traditional ones**.

STATISTICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

74% of the journalists in Serbia use Facebook, about half of them have Twitter and LinkedIn accounts, 38.1% have one on Google+, 12.8% use Instagram, and 11.4% of the journalists interviewed do not use social networks. 71.5% of them said that they use social networks to follow the development of an event, as the data source, while slightly over 55% responded they use them for monitoring the work of other media and for private messaging. Approximately one in four journalist spost on social networks several times a week. **23% post on a daily basis**, while 22% visit and read content on social networks, but they do not post anything.

PANDORA'S BOX -SOCIAL MEDIA IN SERBIA

As a mildly developed democracy with not very stable economic situation and as a typical Balkans' traditional state (a bit conservative) Serbian citizens were quite a lot attached to traditional media (mostly to newspapers and TV). Transition to social media in terms of treating them as credible enough, was slow and lacked trust. Not counting younger part of population, that process was very slow and not so promising, says Staletovic. He also believes that probably the best example when the turnover really happened was noted in May 2014 during unprecedented floods that hit Serbia, in particular the Serbian town Obrenovac. Due to the extraordinary situation where traditional media were slow and not able to cover the whole region, Facebook and Twitter played a crucial role. After these events, and many people being engaged in sharing information, offering assistance and exchanging opinions – it was obvious that **social media became a part of information and communication process in Serbia**.

Srdjan Staletovic, communication expert and team leader of *Media Trips to EU* program, says that nowadays, **social media usage in Serbia is common and popular**, judging by some of the latest estimations that there are more than 3,8 million of active Facebook accounts with many tweeting, posting on Instagram and YouTube, a lot of youngsters chatting via Snapchat and almost everyone using some sort of social media while reading information via Android or iOS gadgets. **Ivan Minic**, editor of MojaFirma.rs and lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communication, agrees, and adds that people are quite active, and they are spending a lot of time on social media platforms. Also, they are more and more interesting to advertisers, and there are more and more people working on branding themselves on social media and producing and publishing content.

Social media in Serbia is primarily used by young and middle-aged people, rarely older ones, and social networks in our country, especially Facebook, are used primarily for the "life simulation" and self-promotion within virtual "friends", says **Maja Vukadinovic**, cultural and media analyst. She also believes that many users of social networks do not personally know most people with whom they contact or exchange views in this way. Also, Vukadinovic adds, **social networks are for many people in Serbia a significant source of information** - for some even the primary. All those who want to be comprehensively informed about political and social topics and especially young people prefer to use social media, but traditional. The people in Serbia who have the need to express opinion on various topics often use social networks to comment on social phenomena. **Predrag Blagojevic**, journalist and editor-in-chief of news-portal Juznevesti and the president of AOM/Association of On–line Media in Serbia, agrees, but adds that instead of being a catalyst for the reaction, **social media acts as an antistatic**. He also adds that instead of showing emotions (displeasure) in specific activities in places where it would have the effect (on the street, in public debates, ...) citizens believe that their task is done by clicking like, share, retweet.

Robert Čoban, co-owner and president of the Serbian media company Color Press Group, believes that Facebook continues to dominate and it is the most widespread network; Instagram is booming, especially among younger and "superficial", while the Twitter population is still considered a social network for the "elite", the place where political and value judgments and attitudes are stated, he says. Blagojevic explains that while the political momentum is conspicuous on Twitter, on Facebook most of the activity is reduced to an entertainment, while on the Instagram there is nothing but the simplest entertainment.

JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Media started using social networks and, soon after, **abusing** the fact that there were so many people on it and that the news spread so fast, states Minic. Čoban also speaks about traditional media abusing social media saying that a large number of media, especially internet-portals, do not have journalists - just people who follow what celebrities share on social networks and make news out of it - from entertainment to politics. Also, a large number of web-sites expects the highest number of visits particularly through social networks. These facts point out that the media today would be impossible without social networks, at least the vast majority of them, believes Čoban.

Maja Vukadinovic thinks that **social media has the most influence on journalists and editors in Serbia in terms of selection of topics and interviewees**, focusing on a specific problem. The content of social networks represents inspiration for journalists who are increasingly transmitting news, comments or interesting things that are posted on someone's account on social networks. Minic agrees, and adds that sometimes **social media is a good place for seeding viral information**, but frequently the dust settles down quickly.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INFLUENCE ON THE PUBLIC

When talking about the influence of the social media in Serbia, Čoban says that in many cases **it affects the public more and faster than traditional media**. On the other hand, Vukadinovic thinks that social media affects just part of the public in Serbia: the educated, young people who follow trends and those who are interested in the different interpretations of social phenomena. But, according to Staletovic, some researchers claim that social media are less confidential and lack trust at the general level, but are more direct, less controlled and mainly free.

On this topic, Blagojevicsays that **social networks are potentially a very powerful tool, and even a weapon**. However, organized campaigns are very rare, and even more rare are the ones backed by the well-designed activity, he adds. Therefore, unfortunately, the events on social networks are most often reduced to activating the lowest instincts and primal feelings, which as a rule coincides with the editorial concept of the Balkan tabloids. Minic agrees with Blagojevic, saying that since social media reach is based on users' reactions the level of journalism is rock bottom, and the **content is pandering to the lowest human instincts**, explaining that it is effective in terms of reactions – clicks – page views, but as a result there is almost no real content left, and even if there is something meaningful it is "lost in the sea of crap".

Unlike Blagojevic and Minic, Staletovic thinks that social media affects the performance of traditional media mainly by making them better and more reactive and responsive. Along with strengthening social profiles, Serbian media strengthens comments and readers' interaction pages. What made traditional media more powerful is shifting to social media profiles (Facebook or Twitter). He adds that the good example of becoming more and more influential is the Serbian leader in number of web hits, the daily Blic which is also the third fast growing community compared with all social media accounts (Twitter in particular) judging by Socialbakers experts.

However, Maja Vukadinovic points out that **most traditional media do not adapt their content to social media**, and publish them in their original form – this primarily refers to newspaper articles that are rarely enriched by infographics or video materials. Therefore, the traditional media in Serbia is still not fully adapted to the new age and needs of social media users, and this is especially true for Twitter accounts of traditional media, she says. Blagojevic agrees, saying that decision-makers in the media have a very superficial approach, explaining that most often they see social media as a copy-paste version of its online editions or often as a single online edition, resulting in just another channel of **communication in one direction**.

SOCIAL MEDIA SETTING THE AGENDA

There are some examples where some Serbian bloggers initiated wider media interest or debate by some blog-posts or by mobilizing crowd on some important issues, says Staletovic. Robert Čoban also believes that it often happens, because a large number of traditional media does not cover numerous events because they believe that it would irritate the government. Maja Vukadinovic agrees with Staletovic and Čoban, saying that people in Serbia would not even learn aboutmany protests and important social events if it were not for Facebook or Twitter. She also adds that increasingly, **users of social media in Serbia record events** with the mobile phones and use the "live" option for posting on social networks. These "reports" are particularly useful during protests and political (civil) assembly, which most traditional media ignore or do not report about objectively.

Staletovic also adds that in the current media scene in Serbia where the Government limits traditional media in opening some issues relevant for public agenda but "hot" – several blogs and web-portals serve the purpose. Staletovic mentions one good example, a blog that analyses aviation and flights, Tango six – where serious and complete analyses appeared many times before traditional media and in a more competitive manner. Some cases like the tragic death of 6 people in the fall of Serbian Army helicopter as well as some more common issues ("how safe Serbian planes are", "who is responsible for importing the Russian MIG 29" etc.) were launched by this blog and further exploited by traditional media. He adds that traditional media very often end up in a situation of quoting stories and reports from blogs and mentioned web portals rather than exploring them.

Predrag Blagojevic thinks that this is not due to the fact that traditional media editors are not aware of certain topics on social networks, but it is the manifestation of the **self-censorship and censorship**. Of course, editors are often to blame because they ignore the views that many social actors (public officials, politicians, activists,...) express on social networks, arguing that it is informal communication. Staletovic agrees and states that generally traditional media considers social media as an informal

source of information and still demonstrates resistance in mentioning them. Robert Čoban believes that if a topic or event "breaks" in social media, traditional media would follow only if their "editorial policy" "allows" and it is increasingly not the case, so these events remain only on social networks that now have greater "reach" than many daily newspapers or magazines in Serbia.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN OASIS OF FREE SPEECH

Ivan Minic states that there is almost a parallel media world of underground online media, and they do get significant number of visits, since the topics are frequently provocative and interesting to masses. Staletovic says that in Serbia some people are "banned' from the traditional media, but still no one who was banned made a success in appearing on social media. The most recent case is the ex editor of pro-Government daily Vecernjenovosti, Srdjan Skoro, who was sacked as editor after criticizing Government policies via Serbian Public broadcaster RTS. Mr. Skoro opened a Twitter account and was active for a while via social networks but stopped on his own, reminds Staletovic.

Vukadinovic states that people who openly criticize the current authorities generally do not have access to traditional media. However, she says, **we can not qualify all traditional media the same**: Kokan Mladenovic, JankoBaljak or BojanaMaljevic - who sharply criticize the Government, can not be heard on the national television - RTS, but they appear as interlocutors in NIN, Nedeljnik, Vreme, Baljak and Bojana are also very present on Twitter. Maja Vukadinovic also emphasizes that the question is to whom the voice of the social media reaches out – "I'm afraid, above all of like-minded people". Blagojevic agrees with Vukadinovic, and says that we cannot generalize and say that all traditional media ban, explaining that we can only talk about the attitude of pro-government media to the "enemies of the state".

There are some cases where whistleblowers appeared on social media and made progress in targeting the problem from the public agenda, says Staletovic. These cases are frequent and well received by the public but they lack public support and further engagement. Lack of support to whistleblowers on social media probably comes out of unclear instructions on what one is supposed to do when he/she sees a whistleblowers' announcement. Practically, when one notices that the problem is reported on, after quoting it and sharing to friends no other action is taken. Fear is not the reason – it's more likely not knowing what you are supposed to do when you notice someone's report on violation of any kind, he explains. Čoban believes that the problem with potential "whistleblowers" in Serbia is that they fear their social networks and the Internet in general do not guarantee enoughanonymity and security, and they are afraid to publish their "findings" in such a way.

Minic says that there are whistleblowers on social media, especially when it comes to mobbing and corruption, and Maja Vukadinovic states that she doesn't know whether Stevan Dojcinovic (KRIK) could be characterized as a whistleblower, but he is the only one she can think of.

SOCIAL MEDIA STARS

It is now official – almost everybody in Serbia follows Novak Djokovic on Twitter. Not only him – there are some other celebrities: DJs, singers, actors... but also some strange characters and hidden agenda creatures. In other words, **Pandora's box with social media in Serbia is widely open so anyone could join**, says Staletovic. Stars of social media in Serbia are: Istok Pavlovic, blogger and lecturer at the faculty; Miloje Sekulic, an internet expert; Twitterer NicimIzazvan, which is the authentic star of social media; Journalist Biljana Lukic and director Stasa Koprivica are very influential on Twitter. Also the singer Vlado Georgiev. I do not know who is "hiding" behind the nickname AstroG on Twitter - but I consider that person influential, says Maja Vukadinovic. There are some Twitter stars among Serbian journalists who are active on social networks and their voices are quite loud on social media (Slavisa Lekic, Slobodan Georgiev, Tatjana Vojtehovski) and people support and trust them, believes Staletovic.

Čoban emphasizes that some of the social media stars have managed quite well to monetize their followers by becoming promoters of certain brands or political parties.

When it comes to trust, people who are critically oriented towards the Government in any way, socially engaged, curious, those who want to hear the other side and generally younger people are more likely to believe the stars of social media, others trust traditional media more, says Vukadinovic. On the other hand, Staletovic says that people do not tend to believe those "stars" more, but they surely pay them a lot of attention. Traditional media in Serbia are mostly boring and predictive with "bad

reputation" from the past, while social media (including those owned by stars) are fresh, new, concise and tend to support two-way communication. When talking about this topic, Čoban reminds that we must bear in mind that "the people" in Serbia also means over 50% of those who do not actively use the Internet and social networks (older and rural part of the population).



Minic says that he doesn't believe that the Government tries to control stars or influential informal leaders, because their influence is not a threat to anyone in charge. But Staletovic reminds that there are some known cases where owners of some accounts were questioned by the police because of publishing content that may be subject to law violation. In case of Serbian social media star and make-up artist Jelena Macic police never filed evidence that she violated any regulation apart of accusing her of being vulgar in public speech. Vukadinovic says that the fact that the current Prime Minister comments tweets of Jelena Macic at press conferences speaks in favor of the thesis that **the Government is trying to control the informal leaders from social networks**.

Blagojevic, says that this type of controlling happens, not in a direct way, but by discrediting themin tabloids and via their "bots". On the other side, they are trying to artificially build "influential" people, he adds. Čoban also says the phenomenon of "bots" who fill the posts of influential Twitter users with negative comments is well known. He also reminds us ofindividuals who were brought in for activities on social networks, lost their jobs or experienced other inconvenience.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICIANS

Initially politicians on social media were exceptions, the so-called "twitterers" among politicians (Gordana Comic, Goran Jesic, etc.) and today almost all politicians on both the left and the right use accounts on social networksvery actively, especially Twitter, says Čoban. As of last year (2016), politicians in Serbia started using social media to express their views more and more. Though most of the politicians that use social media do that regularly, still they like traditional media more, believes Staletovic, and Vukadinovic agrees, stating that with the exception of Sasa Radulovic and recently Sasa Jankovic, the others primarily use traditional media.



Blagojevic says that politicians use social networks same as traditional media –as just **another channel of one way communication**. Social media is not used for the exchange of views, but as a platform for their stating. Minic adds that social media is an important part of politicians' PR platform.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FAKE NEWS

Fake news is a big problem in Serbia. When talking about this topic, Ivan Minicmentions a very popular satirical site called Njuz.net, which publishes this kind of articles daily. Many times regular media picked up these articles and got fooled, in some cases even international media, he adds. Also, there were cases of unconfirmed and false news being published and later revoked. The result of **extremely low levels of media literacy**[8] is a huge vulnerability to false news, states Predrag Blagojevic. If we do not consider Njuz.net, but only the fakenews published by the media (the tabloids), it is obvious that a large part of the audience reacts, often expressing not a shred of doubt. Moreover, they are ready to aggressively defend their confidence in the "truth", he adds.

Staletovic reminds of the case when one influencer from Serbia wanted to play the role of new George Orwell (to test the public by airing fake news). He wrote an extra Internet page (in English) he registered it in Sweden, that famous Serbian Academic and writer DobricaCosicwas proposed for a Nobel Prize for literature in 2011. More than 45% Serbian traditional media published the news (they did not check it on the official Nobel Prize web site) so the whole episode ended by withdrawing

8 More at: http://mirc.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/serbia-fin.pdf Visited: 23.03.2017.

the news from sites and shows including denying the originality. People's reaction was mostly oriented towards the lack of trust in media (both social media and traditional) and confirmation that "post-truth" phase arrived in Serbia contrary to general assumption that Serbia is late in trends comparing to the rest of the planet.

The problem is that there is no serious and regular discussion in Serbia on the issue of fake news, says Staletovic. There are some isolated cases where professional associations of journalists dedicate one or two sessions to the problem but the focus of the discussion goes in some other directions. In some cases, in high schools, as part of some lectures dedicated to media literacy there are debates on trust, sources, how to be sure, how to stop fake news – but again, these discussions and debates mainly target digital literacy and not the real problem of fake news or creation of news with some purpose other than reporting, explains Srdjan Staletovic.

Vukadinovic thinks that **there are sporadic discussions about the topic of fake news**, and panels where this topic is analyzed, among others, but she does not believe that their reach and influence is large. It looks like freedom of the media and the difficult financial situation of journalists are the primary topics for the media profession in Serbia. "I am afraid that the issue of false news has not seriously become an agenda", says Vukadinovic. She also adds that she has the impression that professors are, much more than the journalists, concerned about the false news, but it often remains in the domain of academic discussion. Čoban agrees with others and says that when it comes to the Serbian society, that discussion has not yet had its turn, because the traditional media is flooded with 'fake news' and often for well-planned reasons such as "media racket", or attempt to mislead voters or consumers on behalf of someone else.

Predrag Blagojevic says that there's almost no hint of discussion about the problem of fake news. **Press Council as a self-regulatory body whose credibility is in constant growth could be an important factor**. Blagojevic even proposed that the media who have expressed their willingness to accept the jurisdiction of the Council, or even just declare that they want to respect the Code of Journalists, begin the process of working on building the brand of the Press Council together - through the campaign of putting the logo of the Council on the title page of the printed edition or the top of the website, which would represent a kind of guarantor of quality and accuracy.

CONCLUSION

Social media are very popular in Serbia. For many people they are a significant source of information – especially for youngsters and those who do not trust traditional media. People who want to hear the other side of the story, and generally younger people, are more likely to believe the stars of social media than the traditional media.

Some think that social networks affect the public both more and faster than traditional media, but as Čoban reminds us, we must bear in mind that "the people" in Serbia also means over 50% of those who do not actively use the Internet and social networks (the older and rural part of the population).

Traditional media are present on social networks, but they are still not fully adapted to the new age and the needs of social media users. In most cases, social media pages of traditional media are just copies of their online editions. Two-way communication is very rare.

Usually page administrators just publish news from web sites and do not interact with users. This also happens with social media accounts of politicians, who often use them just to state their mind, not to interact.

Very often traditional media gets the inspiration from social networks, but in most cases the discourse is banal and trivial. When it comes to protests or important social events, traditional media isn't always ready to follow social media, because of self-censorship and censorship that is widespread in Serbia.

People who openly criticize the current authorities generally do not have access to traditional media, so they try to express themselves using Facebook or Twitter. Because of that, the government is trying to control the informal opinion leaders, and there are known cases of people who were brought in for activities on social networks, lost their jobs or experienced some other inconvenience like being called "an enemy of the state" or "a spy"[9].

Media freedom in Serbia is a big issue and so is fake news. Another problem is that there is no serious and regular discussion on the issue of fake news. Extremely low level of media literacy in Serbia is also connected to this. Press Council could be an important factor in solving these problems, as well as constant media and digital education of all people, regardless of age.

9 Example: http://www.informer.rs/vesti/drustvo/61690/FOTO-SADO-MAZO-FRANCUSKI-SPIJUN-zapravo-glavni-urednik-KRIK Visited: 23.03.2017.

SOCIAL MEDIA VS "TRADITIONAL" MEDIA PLATFORMS IN BULGARIA

Yana Pelovska, researcher,
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SOCIAL MEDIA AT A GLANCE

Statistics and data about the online sector in Bulgaria are not available and that is why it is hard to tell the actual number or share of people who inform themselves primarily from social media. As things currently stand, traditional sources, such as TV and newspapers (and mostly the former), remain the most influential sources of news. While trust in TV, in particular, has been eroding for some time, the majority of Bulgarians still watch and get information from the three biggest channels in the country.[12]

In the meantime, social media are becoming more and more popular across most segments of the population. It has more to do with sheer technological evolution and the penetration of technologies, such as computers and mobile phones.

"Facebook is by far the most prevalent social media in Bulgaria. It is used by all segments of the population. The most notable somewhat recent development show a large portion of the people above the age of 40 joining the network, following the initial wave of mostly younger people that joined after Facebook's inception over ten years ago", says Boyan Inavovich from Perceptica, company specialized in monitoring, measurement and analytics of mainstream and social media.

As is the case in other countries, teenagers and young adults are also drawn in to other social media, like Instagram and WhatsApp. They represent the vast majority of users of those media.

Twitter is a somewhat interesting case in Bulgaria where not that many people have Twitter accounts. It could be argued that the microblogging platform is popular amongst more 'elitist' users who tend to represent the better educated and more tech savvy part of the population. The typical Bulgarian Twitter user is a marketing expert, a social media specialist, or a programmer. This creates a sort of an echo chamber where most influential Twitter users hold mostly similar views of political, economic, etc. matters, which views are far from representative for the entire population.

The blogosphere, for one, seems to be a dying phenomenon in Bulgaria (alongside forums – to some extent). While bloggers did emerge as influential opinion leaders a couple of years ago, they have slowly been losing their popularity ever since, with many of them turning to Facebook as a better platform to have their positions heard.

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Facebook is the one single social network that could really influence the agenda of traditional media and has done so in a number of occasions. Civil protests in the country are predominantly organised via social media and Facebook, in particular. In that sense, traditional media are the ones that follow behind and simply report on events that have already been popularised on social media. In a couple of notable cases from a couple of years ago, TV channels refused to report on environmental protests (or covered them in a negative manner), causing an outrage on social media and further eroding trust in traditional media.

A prominent recent case had a journalist quit one of the two major national TV channels (NOVA) over allegations of censorship. He wanted to present his position in a TV show on NOVA's biggest competitor, bTV, but the show in question got cancelled. The show host (Slavi Trifonov) set up a press conference on the next day. It was broadcasted live on Facebook, with tens of thousands of viewers watching it at any given moment. Social media are increasingly seen as the way to avoid the censorship associated with traditional media.

1 Media Use in the European Union, p. 44 http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_media_en.pdf
2 Общественомнение и социалнинагласи в Българияпрезюли 2014 г., pp 48-50http://osi.bg/downloads/File/2014/Public_opinion_July2014_30.07%20F2.pdf

In the past, there have been other notable cases of journalists being ousted from traditional media and opting to become bloggers instead. However, it could be argued that the likes of Ivo Indzhev and Veselin Zhelev are much less influential as bloggers than they were as journalists in TV channels/newspapers.

Former (and future) PM Boyko Borisov is a great example for a politician who is really active on Facebook. He has over 185,000 followers and shares pretty much everything he does as a politician. Traditional media rigorously follow his posts and report on them. Online new media go as far as posting breaking news that are just quotes from Borisov's Facebook wall.

Others have also tried sharing their activities on Facebook, but they mostly get mocked by users. The most notable such example is that of Nikolay Barekov (former journalist and current MEP) whose less-than-proper posts have become a popular meme.

Other politicians, like former president Rosen Plevneliev and former deputy PM Ivaylo Kalfin tried becoming influencers on Twitter where they found a great target audience for their posts. However, due to the microblogging platform's low popularity in the country, their influence remained limited amongst the general public.

"Most major media have a presence on social networks. While they are trying to implement some best practices in the field, they are still seriously lagging behind the brands that are best in the field. Most media have difficulties communicating with readers via social channels and with dealing with discontent amongst their readership/viewership base in particular" says Petar Galev from A Data Pro, company specialised in content, data and business intelligence services.

Overall, the incorporation of content (inspired) from social media has had a somewhat positive effect on the journalism produced by major news outlets. There is an increasing feeling that media are getting closer to their audience and to presenting the stories of the ordinary people. Many TV channels have incorporated social media posts in programmes in various ways, thus supporting grassroots and citizen journalism.

Social media influencers in Bulgaria are yet to reach a level where they are more trusted than traditional media. While there are some undeniably popular stars, such as vlogger Emil Konrad (popular amongst younger users), Elenko Elenkov (amongst Twitter users), BozhidarBozhanov (popular blogger and political activist), their influence remains noticeable mostly within the circle they are most popular in. Bozhanov is a good example for a blogger and social media influencer who later went on to become a government adviser on e-government.

FAKE NEWS CASES AND PUBLIC REACTION

There has been a number of fake news disseminated by websites whose sole purpose seems to be to share such stories on Facebook. Those websites have been increasing their number in the last couple of years, with a recent investigation into the matter showing they are often run by a single person with a noticeable agenda (mostly pro-Russian ones).

One notable fake news story from 2016 implicated the European Commission in trying to impose a ban on the production of Bulgarian tomatoes. The news took social media by storm and only later it turned out it was completely made up. However, by then it had managed to stir up some anti-EU sentiment.

Discussion on the topic of fake news have only seriously taken off recently – post the U.S. elections and the term being widely associated with President Donald Trump. Up until very recently, the topic represented a significant interest only for a small circle of media experts and organisations that warned against the dangers of fake news. The last couple of months saw the publication of a manual on how to distinguish fake news and most notably – a social media campaign (bairak.bg) aimed at raising public awareness on the topic. The campaign, initiated by website mediapool.com allowed anyone to create an eye-catching title and share it on social platforms. Clicking on the link then led users to a website explaining what fake news are and why people should double-check every piece of dubious looking/sounding information they see on social media.

"So far, there have been no vocal calls for tightening control over media in connection with fake news. The media self-regulation although existent is not functional, which opens the door to third party interference. The freedom of media is generally seen by people, professionals and authorities as something that should be preserved and promoted however there is no clear agreement on who takes ownership and leadership", says Adriana Popova, partner at Intelday Solutions Strategic Communication Agency.

A Facebook post by an environmental activist led to a prominent court case in 2014. In it, BorislavSandov described LachezarTsotsorkov, owner of a copper mine, as an "oligarch" and "poisoner". The final court decision came in August 2016 when the judge imposed a BGN 5,000 fine on Sandov. Although the court ruled that Mr Sandov's statements in the social network were factually correct, they were still deemed to represent an insult and, thus, warrant a substantial fine. This was the first court-imposed fine for an insult via a social media post.

Two years earlier, a family successfully sued a former employee of theirs for libel. The employee's posts alleging that the family were fraudsters brought her a BGN 20,000 fine.

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