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# MEDIA STUDIES AND APPLIED ETHICS

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## THE INEVITABILITY OF DIGITAL PUBLIC SPACE HETEROREGULATION: FRAMING THE PORTUGUESE<sup>2,3</sup>

**Abstract:** *The expectations and behaviors transferred to digital environments harbor broader structures and historical processes that predate the establishment of digital culture itself. For this reason, the actions of individuals in the digital arena represent different forms of technology appropriation. Digital platforms are now recognized as utopian because they amplify new censorious mechanisms. On the one hand, hate speech and various forms of violence shape a new media system; on the other hand, they allow individuals and groups to attempt to condition and silence digital public spaces, especially the female universe. Journalistic activity has always been recognized as an ethical and deontological duty to combat censorship. Based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 31 Portuguese women journalists, this research aims to identify the follow-up of Portuguese media to the successive decadent transformations of digital culture. Using the descriptive approach of thematic analysis, the results expose the inoperability of self-regulation of media and journalists. The bias of traditional values of denunciation is developed in internal rhetoric of violence normalization suffered by journalists, the subsequent disregard of audience participation and the practice of some censorship practices in journalistic contents. This scenario has potentiated the invasive temptations of heteroregulation by the political power, delegating to a public institution the competences for determining which digital contents are worthy of “sanctioning regimes”.*

**Keywords:** *digital platforms, violent participation, journalism, regulation frameworks, heteroregulation.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The expectations and behaviors transferred to digital environments entail broader historical structures and processes that predate the establishment of digital culture itself. For this reason, the actions of individuals in the digital arena tend to evidence different forms of technology appropriation. An example of this is the incivility or the violence, according to the broad sense of the problem (Costa, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). In this context, hate speech has emerged as one of the most expressive forms of digital violence today (Marwick & Miller, 2014), being the participatory spaces hosted by the media preferential places for the practice of individual and collective hostile conducts (Carlsson & Nilsson, 2016; Gardiner, 2018; Milioni, Vadratsikas & Papa, 2012; Nielsen, 2014; Reader, 2012; Simões, 2021; Topinka, 2018; Wright, Jackson & Graham, 2020).

Digital platforms are now recognized within a democratic utopia, whose deliberative value has been lost with the amplification of new censorship mechanisms (Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali, 2013; Costa, 2021c; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013; Wright et al., 2020). This toxicity has been used by individuals and groups who aim to condition and silence digital public spaces, driving a reshaping of a new media system characterized by the chaos of journalists' and media self-regulation inaction. If by disproportionately targeting the female universe (Amaral & Simões, 2021; Costa, 2020; Simões, Amaral, & Santos, 2021; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018), violence impedes the achievement of justice and gender equality, its normalization in the media organizational routines implies arduous challenges for the profession, namely by the pressure that they exert on the productive process and professional authority, often the target of contestation, in a historical moment of rise and consolidation of populisms and the extreme right in the international political landscape (Camponez, 2018; Costa, 2021d; Simões & Camponez, 2020; Simões, 2021).

Recognizing the exercise of journalistic activity as an ethical and deontological symbol of combating censorship (Camponez, 2018; Simões & Camponez, 2020), we depart from 31 semi-structured in-depth interviews with women journalists from the main Portuguese media (print, television, digital, news agencies and freelancers) to explore the adaptation of Portuguese journalism to the successive decadent transformations of digital culture. Using the descriptive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017), this article is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Which direction has been privileged by Portuguese journalistic activity regarding the new censorship mechanisms of the digital era?

RQ2: Does the privileged direction potentiate the heteroregulation of digital public spaces?



## **2. Hate pandemics in the digital arena**

The emergence of digital platforms is indelibly associated with the formulation of high expectations regarding the renewal of deliberative practices. Supposedly, the expansion of access to content production and distribution practices through far-reaching communication tools would enable the strengthening of democratic indices (Carpentier et al., 2013; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). However, we have seen the structural contradictions of these technology-mediated public spaces minimized with the centralization of two axes of analysis: benefits versus harms (Chun, 2016; Massanari, 2014). They generally focused on general patterns at a macro-structural level, rather than analyzing and providing the details of experience in such places, to understand how expectations and behaviors transferred to digital environments harbor in themselves broader structures and prior historical processes (Deuze, 2006; Domingo, Quandt, Heinonen, Paulussen, Singer & Vujnovic, 2008).

Currently, digital environments are recognized as being incompatible with the democratic value idealized for the concept of full participatory culture (Carpentier et al., 2013; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013; Wright et al., 2020). This democratic utopia was first demonstrated with a deconstruction of the complexity of participatory and interactive processes in close relation to cultural and political dimensions (Boyd, 2014; Moon, 2018). In participatory media spaces, the acts of responding to the news cycle or that of participating in public space debates began to demonstrate a growth in violence headed by hate speech, often in the recoil of humour, against journalists, news sources, topics, minority groups, and others (Carlsson & Nilsson, 2016; Gardiner, 2018; Milioni et al., 2012; Nielsen, 2014; Reader, 2012; Simões, 2021; Topinka, 2018; Wright et al., 2020).

On the other hand, digital violence tends to be disproportionately directed against the female gender (Amaral & Simões, 2021; Costa, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Simões et al., 2021; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018), being particularly visible with women of public visibility. The perpetuation of a cycle of violence against the female universe has direct social consequences on the victims and are related to the inhibiting effects on women's participation in the public space and the impediment of achieving justice and gender equality. Regarding the framing of the problematic with women journalists and the identification of the consequences for the journalistic field, it has been identified that the more frequent the assaults are, the most likely it is that journalists become psychologically debilitated and have a dark view of the public, devalue the interaction, normalize violence, limit their exposure, and self-censure (Adams, 2018; Chen, Pain, Y Chen, Mekelburg, Springer & Troger, 2020; Koirala, 2020; Lewis, Zamith & Coddington, 2020; North, 2016).

## **3. Incorporating incivility into journalistic flows**

Until the upgrade of the digital communication environment to service 2.0, the lack of opportunities for readers to introduce issues in the public space was a

reality. Participation was limited to readers sending letters to editors and directors of newspapers (Reader, 2012; Silva, 2008, 2011, 2014). Targeted by a strong journalistic management, the received letters were selected, scrutinized, edited in terms of length and grammar and, therefore, “reflected more what journalists wanted than what the writing public wished” (Reader, 2012: 495).

The paradigm shift occurred with the increased accessibility of individuals to integrate the various digital public spaces, with the emergence of user-generated content for commenting, and with the support of media to incorporate social debates, dialogues, and deliberations through comment boxes (Carlsson & Nilsson, 2016). The weakening of journalism’s monopoly on public debate has, thus, enabled new complex processes to emerge because much of engagement was no longer subject to the direct intervention of editors’ pre-selection (Reader, 2012). A participation that, as it does not always fit the standardized journalistic norms and criteria, ends up being perceived as a problem, instead of a benefit or an opportunity to be explored by newsrooms (Domingo, 2008).

The act of commenting in comment boxes hosted by the media represents one of the main elements of online participatory culture (Miloni et al., 2012; Nielsen, 2014; Topinka, 2018; Wright et al., 2020). On the one hand, it is identified that participants tend to take the same position and most comments do not address journalistic issues (Miloni et al., 2012); on the other hand, journalists’ engagement to provide a more detailed understanding of stories to their audiences through substantive comments, has decreased (Finley, 2015; Pritchard, 2016a, 2016b; Wright et al., 2020).

Such reality is supported by the exponential increase in comments, editorial changes, but mostly because hate speech promotes a view of audience participation with journalists as invaluable and having poor benefits for news content (Nielsen, 2014). While comments can provide both economic benefits, with metadata attracting more advertising revenue, and journalistic benefits, moderating comments is a significant expense that not all media outlets can afford (Wright et al., 2020). Furthermore, poor moderation or lack of it can also contribute to the degradation of journalistic quality and participation spaces (Pritchard, 2016a, 2016b). In this sense, incivility has led many organizations to shut down these participation spaces temporarily or permanently from their websites (Finley, 2015), except on social networks.

Since hate speech and the various forms of violence are the face of the new censoring mechanisms of digital age, as individuals and interest groups seek to condition and silence digital public spaces (Costa, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c), journalism has the ethical and deontological duty to combat censorship and the responsibility to monitor the successive transformations of digital culture (Camponez, 2018; Simões & Camponez, 2020). Although the strengthening and the search for new regulation models adjusted to the digital age are considered instruments to give credibility to the journalistic class and protect the public space from the heteroregulation temptations by public regulatory institutions or political powers, if journalism self-regulation does not operate, the growth of heteroregulation initiatives and, at the same time, information chaos increases (Camponez, 2018; Simões & Camponez, 2020).

#### **4. Framing the Portuguese environment**

In Portugal, along with television as the preferred news source, Facebook is the most used digital platform as a source of knowledge, news content, and the most popular form of public participation, namely in the comment boxes of social media networks (ERC, 2014; Reuters Institute, 2020: 79). When compared to international studies, the Portuguese are among those who make more comments on the news flow in digital platforms (ERC, 2014: 10-11).

The general context of Portuguese communication regulation is constituted by a model with different bodies, whose disarticulations and conceptual divergences and understanding about their responsibilities and competences are exacerbated in the successive changes of the Journalist Statute. Therefore, the conjuncture is marked by vagueness, overlapping powers and alienations about the jurisdictions assigned to self-regulation models (Miranda & Camponez, 2017).

To this overlapping of authorities is added a need to solve mismatches in legislation regarding the definition of Media Bodies, which allows proclaiming excuse of editorial responsibility over violent comments in social networks, even if raised by journalistic content, since digital platforms are proclaimed as external to the medium itself, as non-native platforms (Simões & Camponez, 2020). In this sense, it is expected that regulatory institutions and Portuguese media have many difficulties in managing virtual spaces for readers' comments.

“What may really be changing is the power of the regulators, which is being strengthened. This course will be inevitable if the media do not take the necessary measures to safeguard the quality of debates in their commentary spaces, often used as “audience baiting” in the service of the market” (Simões & Camponez, 2020: 43)

The Portuguese press freedom index has improved consecutively, considering the criteria assessed by Reporters Without Borders since 2015, when it ranked 26th, and is currently in 9th place (RSF, 2021). However, the unfolding political landscape during the Covid-19 Pandemic has permeated, from supposed measures to contain the spread of Sars-CoV-2 virus, the degradation of press freedom. The restriction of access to information and inside some political conferences joined some previous indications that already foreshadowed changes to the free exercise of journalistic activity in Portugal, such as the Public Ministry having ordered the surveillance of two journalists who were investigating an alleged corruption process of Sport Lisboa e Benfica soccer club, to assess the journalists' sources of information (RSF, 2021).

More recently, violence in the form of insults and threats against journalists has increased, mainly in protests by far right and denialist movements against the measures imposed by the government in the epidemiological struggle (Costa, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d; RSF, 2021). On the other hand, the new General Data Protection Regulation has accentuated the blocking of journalists from exercising their right to access administrative information of the Public Administration (Campos, 2021; Santa-Bárbara, 2021).

In the panorama of media organizations, the repeated lack of working conditions to carry out the only investigative journalism program with weekly periodicity

in Portugal, forces the exit of Sandra Felgueiras, coordinator and journalist, and, after her statement, the Information Department of the public television station decides to immediately extinguish the format, even with several important ongoing investigations (DN, 2021). In turn, we witness an unprecedented principle in journalism, with the “unpublication” of an opinion article written by a doctor against the Covid-19 vaccination of children, published in the digital version of one of Portugal’s main reference newspapers. The justification of the editorial direction, with “the contemptuous and superfluous tone used by the author in relation to several personalities of our public life” (Correio da Manhã, 2021), generates a civil society movement arguing censorship *a posteriori* and gives rise to a “Manifesto for Freedom of Expression”, which gathers a set of personalities from the most diverse intellectual and ideological backgrounds (TVI, 2021). This initiative results to discredit one of the main signatories, Raquel Varela, who is a historian, critical researcher, and public intellectual of international recognition (Pinto, 2021).

In this framework, there is the formulation of the “Portuguese Human Rights Charter in the Digital Age”, published in the form of legislation, to define the first attempt of the regulatory approach in the digital environment, where the Portuguese State has assigned powers, in article 6, to a public entity, namely the Regulatory Authority for the Media, to determine which digital contents are worthy of “sanctioning regimes”, under the “Right of protection against disinformation”. In the same stipulation, the creation of fact-checking structures by media organizations is promoted (Diário da República, 2021). Consequently, Portugal falls three parameters in the “Global Report on the State of Democracy”, becoming the only country in Western Europe with such a significant regression in the quality of democracy towards authoritarianism (Santos, 2021).

## 5. Methodological approaches

### 5.1. Research goals

Recognizing the exercise of journalistic activity as an ethical and deontological symbol to combat censorship (Camponez, 2018; Simões & Camponez, 2020), which now incorporates and accompanies the evolution of the potentialities of digital tools, namely on the female universe (Costa, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c), we depart from 31 semi-structured in-depth interviews, a method of data production, with women journalists from the main Portuguese media (press, television, digital, news agencies and freelancers) to explore a poorly documented social issue (Baker, 2004; Charmaz, 2006; Lavrakas, 2008; Miller & Glassner, 2004; Saldaña, 2009): the adaptation of Portuguese journalism to the successive decadent transformations of digital culture. Using the descriptive qualitative approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017), this article is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Which direction has been privileged by Portuguese journalistic activity regarding the new censorship mechanisms of the digital era?

RQ2: Does the privileged direction potentiate the heteroregulation of digital public spaces?

## **5.2. Methodological trajectories**

A qualitative methodological research based on semi-structured in-depth interviews was preferred, since, besides representing one of the most traditional forms of data production, it allows the researcher to be guided according to the script, theme sensitivity and interaction strategies. It is possible to obtain answers to the same questions from all interviewees and, simultaneously, explore the information and experiences while adaptating to the peculiarities of each interviewee (Baker, 2004; Charmaz, 2006; Lavrakas, 2008; Miller & Glassner, 2004; Saldaña, 2009) - see “Appendix A” for the questions used with the participants.

As a contextually situated symbolic interaction, the interview allows, through the exploration of interviewees’ views around issues (emergent narratives) in an open, authentic, and truthful way, access to internal knowledge structures (individual beliefs, attitudes, and meanings) attributed to experiences and, particularly, to the social world - the external dimension (Baker, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Miller & Glassner, 2004: 126).

In this direction and while defining the methodological strategy, we identified that thematic analysis has been presented as an independent qualitative descriptive approach, given that it permits “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes)” in the data under analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79), from the following six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017):

1. Familiarization of data, after its transcription, along with the field notes (pertinent observations, stories, narratives, professional practices, among others), to understand the depth and breadth of content (meanings and patterns).
2. Localization and identification of the main codes named or implied in the facts, giving rise to several central themes.
3. Classification and comparison of all relevant coded data, so that, from the discursive activities, the main and secondary categorizations allow themes to be identified.
4. Review of the elaborated set of themes, to assess whether the coded data extracts form a pattern consistent with each theme.
5. Defining and naming themes. Examination of how the interviewees constructed the statements, produced definitions, and managed their participation to analyze, organize, and relate the overall themes and concepts.
6. Analytical production can contemplate putting together data extracts, research questions, and/or scholarly literature.

The contacts were established, indiscriminately and impartially, between December 15, 2020, and February 15, 2021, through professional emails available in the professional social network LinkedIn, with Portuguese women journalists

working for the main national generalist media (press, television, digital, news agencies and freelancers). The correspondence explained the research objectives, the procedures for conducting the interviews, and the guarantee of confidentiality. A total of 180 invitations were sent, from which 48 positive and negative responses (26.7%) were obtained. Out of this set, 132 did not give any response (73.3%), corresponding to an acceptance rate of 17.2%, in line with what had been observed in other studies (Chen et al., 2020; Koirala, 2020; Lewis et al., 2020).

The 31 interviews were conducted between January 12 and February 19, 2021, with an average duration of one hour, from the Zoom platform. As shown in Table 1, twenty-two media were represented, with television being the predominant medium, with 12 journalists from 6 media outlets, followed by the press with 9 professionals from 5 media outlets.

**Table 1** Profile of the media represented (Elaborated by the author)

TELEVISION	PRESS	DIGITAL	NEWS AGENCIES	INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND FREELANCERS
6 media	5 media	3 media	2 media	6 media
12 journalists	9 journalists	4 journalists	2 journalists	4 journalists
31 journalists and 22 media				

We found that 38.7% of the participants (12 journalists) write for several news sections, which demonstrates the versatility and the increased workload required for journalists today (see Table 2). The average profile of the journalists interviewed is young, white, middle-class, educated, childless, and multiplatform. In the age distribution, the modal age group comprises the period of 26 to 35 years (58.1%) and thus the average age is close to 35 years (34.5). Finally, more than a third of the interviewees (38.7%) entered journalism 11 years ago, which demonstrates a certain longevity of the professional career.

**Table 2** News sections represented (Elaborated by the author)

Journalistic section	Number of journalists
Celebrities	1
Crime	1
Culture	1
Economics	1
International	1
Politics	3
Research	1
Society	5
Sports	5
Various	12
<b>10+ departments</b>	<b>31 women journalists</b>



## 6. Results and discussion

Media comment boxes on social networks are *per se* spaces for animosities, offenses, insults, hate speech, and the perpetuation of discriminatory, homophobic, and xenophobic acts. There is a tendency for various forms of violence to coexist, not necessarily directed at professionals. The most common forms of violence perpetrated against Portuguese journalists, inside and outside the participatory spaces hosted by the media, are verbal aggression, hate speech, intimidation, and sexual harassment and assault. On the other hand, there is also a very strong violence from political actors who try to condition the freedom of the Portuguese press, ending up legitimizing and promoting hostility from other individuals on digital platforms.

It has even happened to me with members of parliament (...) E25, 9/02/2021

Members of António Costa's government didn't like it and called my editor because the post (...) E15, 30/01/2021

I received insults from a PCP councilman on my Facebook (...) E23, 6/02/2021

There are several discursive patterns that show the insensitivity of journalists to the most common forms of violence (hate speech and insult). The absence of action by journalists when they are assaulted is due to the lack of support from media organizations, which adopt within the newsroom's rhetoric of devaluation and normalization of violence as a symbol of good work. Consequently, this culture of non-response and inaction of the media about the violence committed against their professionals ends up being framed, in the same way, in relation to the comment spaces on digital platforms, going against the ethical and deontological foundations that govern the journalistic activity. The rhetoric of devaluation also shapes the perceptions of journalists in the way they should deal with the problem and (not) act in public digital spaces.

There is this advice for all of us to do this: ignore the comment boxes. E11, 29/01/2021

We are more interested in statistics, seeing the number of views we have and comment entries, than we are in comments. E20, 4/02/2021

This is something we hear a lot: "It's part of it"; "It'll happen more often!"; "It's because you're doing your job well! E03, 22/01/2021

The orientation of inaction, both towards violence in participatory media spaces and against journalists, corresponds to an unprecedented bias of the profession around numbers (views, interactions, and comments). If there had been a self-regulation of the profession to monitor and moderate audience participation through the promotion of media literacy, and avoid the invasive temptations of political power, a model of heteroregulation on the digital public space would not have been implemented at a time when Portugal is witnessing a complete degradation of its democratic indices.

It would be up to the information directors, Regulatory Entity for the Media, Presidency of the Republic, and all agents that have the obligation to defend the freedom of press to act in unison. Where are they? Sometimes they talk nicely, but daily we don't see a firm position that dissuades. E31, 4/05/2021

I think the measure already exists, but I don't know if it's enough: the monitoring of comments. I think there must be a filter, and I don't think filtering comments is an attack on free speech. E07, 25/01/2021

It would already be a good start to discuss these problems within the journalistic class (...) Discussing, raising awareness, and transmitting the human side of the issue are important steps to take. Media literacy in society is central today. E28, 12/02/2021

Ideally, people should be informed and educated, to realize that when they say certain things, they are assaulting others. I think there are people who probably don't even realize that. I don't think it's an easy problem to solve in a society that values freedom of speech. Whenever we ban something, we may be opening the door for others to be banned. E30, 19/02/2021

I think it comes through public awareness. We really must stop and explain to people that the journalist is performing a function. And the journalist in a role is not giving an opinion. Sometimes these concepts get confused a lot. At the level of behavior in the media, one or another joke may not go down well and be interpreted in a way that doesn't make any sense. So, maybe someone who is the target of hate will not feel comfortable to come to the newsroom and tell it. Why? Because the position you also have on the other side doesn't make the person comfortable to do that. E18, 3/02/2021

In short, a greater awareness for those who are online that actions have a consequence; a stronger regulator; the legislation must be clear on that, the fact that you are committing a crime; there are consequences; the media side also must exist and do their part of the job; and not look the other way when you are threatened, harassed, and insulted. E17, 2/02/2021

## **7. Concluding considerations**

Collaborative production, digital interaction and comment boxes have exponentiated the possibilities of civic participation in digital environments, but have also increased, in equal proportions, toxicity and conflictuality, which have quickly transitioned into more hostile forms of incivility. In this framework, the media system has suffered a degradation of journalistic values and, therefore, does not know how to respond to the new challenge of managing public participation; additionally, it cannot identify this instance as an opportunity for the credibility of the class.

The erosion of the boundaries of freedom of expression in the digital public space has led the Portuguese journalist to learn to work in full communion with the violence that circulates online, but also with the outbursts of aggression they are targets of. This devaluation and normalization of violence, together with the inoperability of self-regulation of media and journalists, enhance the materialization of the invasive heteroregulation temptations by the Portuguese political power.



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## NEMINOVNOST HETEROREGULACIJE DIGITALNOG JAVNOG PROSTORA: UOKVIRIVANJE PORTUGALSKOG

**Apstrakt.** Očekivanja i ponašanja preneti u digitalna okruženja nose šire strukture i istorijske procese koji prethode uspostavljanju same digitalne kulture. Iz tog razloga, akcije pojedinaca u digitalnoj areni predstavljaju različite oblike prisvajanja tehnologije. Digitalne platforme su sada prepoznate kao utopijske jer pojačavaju nove cenzurne mehanizme. Ako, s jedne strane, govor mržnje i različiti oblici nasilja oblikuju novi medijski sistem, s druge strane, dozvoljavaju pojedincima i grupama da pokušaju da uslovljavaju i učutkaju digitalne javne prostore, posebno ženski univerzum. Novinarska delatnost je oduvek bila prepoznata kao etička i deontološka dužnost u borbi protiv cenzure. Zasnovano na polustrukturiranim dubinskim intervjuima sa 31 portugalskom novinarkom, ovo istraživanje ima za cilj da identifikuje praćenje portugalskih medija na uzastopne dekadentne transformacije digitalne kulture. Koristeći deskriptivni pristup tematske analize, rezultati otkrivaju neoperabilnost samoregulacije medija i novinara. Pristrasnost tradicionalnih vrednosti denuncijacije razvijena je u unutrašnjoj retorici normalizacije nasilja koje trpe novinari, naknadnog zanemarivanja učešća publike i prakse nekih cenzurnih praksi u novinarskim sadržajima. Ovaj scenario je potencirao invazivna iskustva heteroregulacije od strane političke moći, delegirajući na javnu instituciju nadležnost da utvrđuje koji digitalni sadržaji su vredni „režima sankcionisanja”.

**Ključne reči:** digitalne platforme, nasilno učešće, novinarstvo, regulativni okviri, heteroregulacija.

### Appendix A - Semi-structured in-depth interview guide

1. Have you ever been targeted or closely experienced any form of in-person and/or digital violence? Can you tell us about it, please?
2. How often did the abusers occur? On which platforms?
3. Did you try to identify the authors of these aggressive outbursts?
4. How has this experience influenced your professional activity?
5. How did this experience affect your personal life?
6. Did you take any action after these acts of aggression?
7. Did you share these acts of aggression with your superior? And with your colleagues?
8. What is your view about audience interaction?
9. Is there moderation of online comments in your newsroom? How does your organization view hate speech against journalists?
10. Does the growth of hostility, hate speech and misogyny on digital platforms threaten press freedom?
11. In your opinion, what measures can be adopted?
12. Given the growth of hatred against journalists, have you ever considered changing your profession?



## SYMBOLIC STRUGGLES IN SERBIA – A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DAILY NEWSPAPERS FOR THE PERIOD 2006 – 2013<sup>2,3</sup>

**Abstract:** *Contemporary Serbian society is divided in many ways. Certain divisions are more conspicuous than others, for instance the political ones, while some of them still participate in the distribution of power in the social field, although it is not that transparent. This was particularly the case during the time of the division into the “first” and “second” Serbia (Spasić, Petrović, 2013). During the analysed period (2006–2013), Serbia became an independent country and an ostensible consensus was reinforced regarding the adoption of European values<sup>4</sup>, the path to the EU and a peaceful future. The divisions following the regression of nationalist forces on the public scene in Serbia are not as clear-cut as in the previous period, before the declaratory, one could even say partly “tactical”, unification of political forces over the EU path.*

*The aim of this paper is to sketch the outlines of symbolic struggles in contemporary Serbian society through a content analysis of daily newspapers for the period 2006–2013. Bearing in mind that the analysis covers a longer period, it is expected that it can provide an insight into the shift in the balance of the struggle. Findings imply the presence of symbolic struggles in the political arena, as well as in the area of ethnic relations as the most dominant ones. This trend is maintained throughout the observed period.*

**Key words:** *symbolic struggles, ethnic relations, political struggles, nationalism, classification, Us and Them*

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<sup>4</sup> This consensus among the main political actors was reached as early as October 2000 (see: <https://www.mei.gov.rs/eng/serbia-and-eu/history/>), and was further reinforced in 2008 with the coalition between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia.



## 1. Problem and theoretical framework

A social community attempts to raise members that possess a socially desirable character, individuals who will become well-integrated and who will feel “comfortable in the culture” of their own society. The manner in which this value basis of a society will be defined depends on the group that imposes itself as the governing and dominant one in a social community. The dominant group forces its *system of classification* that gets interiorized and accepted to a certain extent by members of the society. The larger the number of society members that reach a consensus, the more integrated the community and the higher the level of *moral density* (Durkheim, [1893] 1997). Furthermore, with an increase in symbolic struggles in a society, the divisions – class-related (Bourdieu, 1984; Parkin 1974; DiMaggio 1987; Savage et al., 2013; Jarness, 2017; Lindell, 2020), ethnic (Barth, 1969, Verdery, 1994; Horowitz, 1985; Spinner, 1994; Sanders, 2002; Wimmer, 2008; Hancock, 2017), cultural (Somers, 1994; Lamont 2000; Van Eijck, 2001; Swidler 2001), become stricter, while the criteria for categorization and differentiation grow more stringent. Symbolic capital, the process of its manipulation, and symbolic struggles for the establishment of the domination of one’s own symbolic content allow symbolic power to also become a source of real social inequality and exclusion (Lamont, 1992; Lamont, Molnár, 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, Lamont. 2007).

On the political scene, this means drawing up ideological borders and creating fronts for political struggles, for example, along the line of the conflict between the positive effects of the implementation of European values in the culture of the Serbian society on the one hand, and the negative effects of “getting closer” to the European Union on the preservation of national identity on the other hand.

Generally speaking, profound divisions in the social context can lead to difficulties in maintaining internal stability. In other words, the set of common social values is limited, therefore, the norms that stem from those values – moral, religious, customary, as well as legal – and bring the community together are present or observed in partial groups, which causes a deep division in the society. A large number of members feel rejected in specific parts of the society in which they live. Naturally, under the influence of modernization and globalization, Serbia shares the destiny of the contemporary world in the sense of unavoidable effects of these processes; however, it also differs from the rest in a series of specificities. These can primarily be related to the value disorientation after the fall of socialism, the strengthening of nationalism and collectivism, warring past and slow transition. Moreover, Serbia is predominantly an “Orthodox country”<sup>5</sup> with a renewed and fervently accepted religious tradition (Author, 2013), attempting to overcome the identity confusion with regard to the process of self-declaration, under the conditions of separation from the formerly “brotherly” related Slavic peoples, on its way to the EU.

The analysis conducted, the results of which are presented here, aims to identify the symbolic divisions along the lines of religion, ethnic belonging, political

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<sup>5</sup> Serbia is a country with a population that predominantly identifies as Orthodox Christian, while the Constitution defines Serbia as a secular state.



orientation, locality (rural-urban division), manners and the like. Bourdieu (1985) speaks of two fields in which symbolic struggles take place: everyday life and the institutional framework. Inside institutions, the political powers in office have a much greater chance of imposing their own worldview, since the contemporary Serbian state is to a large degree party political; thus, the parties in power control the institutions, while social and cultural policies are mainly created by party members to the detriment of professionalism (Pešić, 2007; Cvejić, 2016; Stanojević, Gundogan, Babović, 2016). The analysis presented in this paper follows both of these fields of symbolic struggles. Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical concept that, in addition to economic factors, emphasizes cultural ones as well (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu, Passeron 1990), which divide and characterize the divided classes – “cultural symbols and practices, from artistic tastes, clothing styles and eating habits to religion, science, and philosophy, including the language in which members of society communicate, embody interests and serve to enhance social inequalities” (Swartz, 1997: 6), we managed to create a methodological construct that allowed us to include all of these elements in the analysis instrument, with the idea of discovering the basic dividing lines (Spasić, 2013).

## 2. Content analysis method and sample

The instrument created with the aim of analysing symbolic confrontation and struggles is based on the sociological tradition (Lamont, Molnar, 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, Lamont, 2007; Jermes, 2017) that recognizes cultural elements of social divisions and struggles as important (besides the material ones), i.e., as a resource used by social groups in the struggle for occupying social positions and controlling social resources.

The analysis may contribute both to the understanding of social events and to the prediction of social changes in Serbia. The categories that represent the guidelines in this analysis include the cultural characteristics that are common to the Serbian and other societies subjected to modernization and globalization, but also those that originate from the Eastern, Balkan and local milieu of the Serbian society.

Content analysis of the media represents an important task because the media exert a significant influence on the creation of public opinion and awareness in people. One must take into account that media reporting on social reality passes through the lens of editorial policies and the values of ownership structures in newspapers. Therefore, we attempted to soften that fact and obtain as objective a picture as possible by including into the analysis daily newspapers with different concepts and different target audiences. Still, our scope remained within the circle of daily newspapers that certainly want to communicate with wider audiences. The analysed newspapers included *Danas*, *Blic* and *Kurir*. The method of content analysis was selected because it successfully combines quantitative and qualitative analyses. One of the goals of this study was to locate the dominant actors and their attitudes used to create images of reality, produce divisions, determine the “right” values, normalize opinions on certain relevant and current topics, etc.

The categories for content analysis were created after a pilot study. As already mentioned, we searched for symbolic divisions and “wars” along the lines of divisions within the possession of material wealth or lack thereof, religious and ethnic divisions, political orientations. Inside these relations we tested the main lines of conflict, such as: authoritarianism and democracy; non/transparency; collectivism as opposed to individualism; a conflict between cosmopolites and patriots; support or denunciation of diversity in sexual orientation; issues of gender distinction and perception; but also issues of moral systems of traditionalism and liberalism, as well as issues of egalitarianism and social justice. Along with all of these areas, we also emphasized the cultural sphere, where we searched for divisions between the educated and uneducated, urban and rural, and a more general topic of manners, from decency to vulgarity. We arrived at these categories by analysing theoretical conceptions that have been substantiated in earlier studies (Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990; Lamont, Fournier, 2002).

The newspaper article was the unit of analysis. Quantitative analysis of the above topics yielded information on their frequency and prominence within newspaper content – thus, to a certain extent, their presence in the public sphere, while qualitative content analysis provided findings on the manner in which the given topics were discussed and how they were used to perform delineation.

*The sample* included articles from the above newspapers for the period 2006–2013. This period was selected as we consider it to be a meaningful whole that can be analysed, due to a relative crystallization of value conceptions after 2000. Already in 2013, fundamental changes took place in the political arena, resulting in this period requiring separate analysis. Each of the newspapers was represented by eighty randomly selected issues proportionally distributed per year, which amounted to 240 analysed issues in total.

We decided to choose *Danas*, *Blic* and *Kurir* as representatives of, on the one hand, typical and, on the other hand, different editorial policies and readerships. Thus, we attempted to cover the greatest possible portion of daily newspapers readership, which eventually afforded us the right to assume their influence on the opinions and positioning of readers. The *Blic* daily newspaper is intended for mass audiences, with a continuous pro-European orientation. The peculiarity of the *Kurir* newspaper is a clear orientation towards mass audiences and short news without many comments. Furthermore, what is also observable is the affinity to and preferential treatment of the currently dominant political powers over a certain period of time, followed by a more critical stance of them in another, i.e., an obvious influence of daily politics on editorial policy. This newspaper can be labelled as sensationalistic, intended for the widest possible audience. Finally, the *Danas* daily newspaper is directed towards a more intellectual audience, and it contains polemics and leans towards pro-Europeanism. This daily newspaper is characterized by a more thorough and substantial examination of social phenomena, with critical insights and confrontation of different opinions, which makes it a non-classical informative newspaper.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> While there have been no relevant studies to date profiling the readership of daily newspapers in Serbia, some data are available on the website of the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia:

As far as the period encompassed by the analysis is concerned (from 2006 to 2013), it was characterized by a dominance of issues of national interest<sup>7</sup> (Montenegro leaving the federation, the issue of the status of Kosovo, Kosovo independence declaration, cooperation with the Tribunal in The Hague, accession to the EU, etc.). After 2013, no significantly greater changes occurred in terms of international politics and the position of Serbia, even though political changes had taken place in 2012 when the Serbian Progressive Party came to power. Even though it originated from the Serbian Radical Party, a party with an exceptionally nationalistic ideological orientation, this political power which to this day is the sovereign ruler of Serbia wavers in its foreign policy between EU accession, which it declares itself to be in favour of, and a relationship with Russia, which it tries to maintain. On a more local level, it attempts to cater to the nationalistic segment of the voting population by occasionally resorting to inflammatory rhetoric – harsh speeches delivered on the topic of the borders of the Republic of Serbia or its relations with Croatia and Albania, the relativization of the issue of the status of the Republic of Srpska, and the like. The internal commotion results in further divisions into “the people”, who are the focus of attention of this government, and the increasingly marginalized “intellectual elite”, which has a critical disposition.

### 3. Findings

Using a qualitative and quantitative analysis of newspaper content on a previously defined sample, we reconstructed the basic discursive divisions articulated in the newspaper media space found in a single segment of the history of contemporary Serbian society (2006-2013).

The most pronounced divisions identified are those based on **a)** political preference, followed by **b)** ethnic divisions, with those relating to **c)** material status, i.e., divisions between *the world of the poor* and *the world of the rich*, in third place. Also observed were very interesting constructions of boundaries between *the educated* and *non-educated*, *cultured* and *non-cultured*, *urban* and *rural*, followed by divisions resulting from conflicts between *gender* identities and *sexual* orientations, but also by *confessional* belonging.

For the purposes of this paper, we have decided to present the most frequent and pronounced divisions, the ones that emphasize ethnic and political differences.

#### 2.1. Ethnic belonging

The topic featuring most frequently in the analysed material, and one that emerged as an important dividing line in contemporary Serbia, is ethnic belonging as a factor of differentiation between *Us* and *Them*.

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<https://nuns.rs/novine-koje-citaju-najuticajnji-ljudi-u-zemlji/>

The selection and impressions provided are therefore the result of the authors' own insights.

<sup>7</sup> Given the turbulent and as yet unresolved ethnic relations in the last thirty years, national interest remains a lively and open topic. The studied period includes numerous challenges and events as mentioned in the text, resulting in intense confrontations in discourse on these issues.

Generally speaking, this is the most frequent dividing line that appears in the analysed period in the *Blic* newspaper. What stands out within this topic is the Kosovo subtopic, which is the one most written about. This topic is discussed the most frequently, not only among the subtopics on ethnic orientation but in general, among all the topics (categories) that were analysed. A total of 165 pieces of news relate to the issue of Kosovo. A substantial portion of these is dedicated to the acquittal of Haradinaj, a former leader of the KLA, by The Hague Tribunal, which caused considerable dissatisfaction in Serbia. Of course, the news on this subtopic is not uniform, but characterized by great diversity, which ranges from the consideration of the status of Kosovo on all levels (*Use the Constitution to defend our right to Kosovo*: “Should a solution be imposed regarding the status of Kosovo, that is, the independence of this province, the Prime Minister of Serbia Vojislav Koštunica shall propose that the new constitution state that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia, and that the constitution will come into force there when the requisite conditions are met.” - Aleksandar Simić, PM’s advisor; “...this move by the Serbian authorities is ‘quite useless’ since international agreements and law are above domestic legislation” - Momčilo Grubač, professor of constitutional law and former federal minister of justice – *Blic*, 3/8/2006; “Kosovo is clearly an independent state and its citizens are citizens of Kosovo. What is currently being done in Serbia reveals a tendency for various abuses. I am convinced that the citizens of the Republic of Kosovo, which also includes Serbs, will choose to align themselves to their Kosovo identity” – Deputy PM of Kosovo Hajredin Kuçi), the connection between recognizing Kosovo as an independent state and the road to the EU, negotiations between Belgrade and Priština, the rights of ethnic minorities in Kosovo (*Jahjaga: Serbia must give up its territorial pretensions*: “Kosovo is the homeland of all, and you, as citizens of Serbian ethnicity, shall be able to exercise all your national, religious, educational and cultural rights here. For that, you will have mine and the full support of the Kosovo institutions ...” Kosovo President Atifete Jahjaga called on Serbian authorities today to “give up on their territorial pretensions” and “cease their support of illegal and criminal organizations” in three northern Kosovo municipalities, which she said are holding hostage the future and progress of citizens, *Blic*, 8/12/2011; *Trajković: Accusations against Serbs from the north of Kosovo won’t help de-escalate the situation*: “That international protection isn’t working, however, seeing as how in November this year alone several Serbs were killed or wounded. What the Serbs in Kosovo are facing now is a process of getting accustomed to a whole new reality, one that could, unfortunately, be accompanied by the departure of some Serbs from their centuries-old homes” – Rada Trajković, Serbian MP in Kosovo Parliament), the issue of Serbian national interests (*Pobeda*: “By boycotting the elections, which they were encouraged to do by official Belgrade authorities, Serbs have lost power in the only five municipalities: three in the north, two under Albanian jurisdiction. The boycott accomplished nothing, for the second time, at least not to the benefit of the Serbian community [...] Official Belgrade seems to be only interested in territory, and even then, only one part of it – the north. Because it is already common knowledge that, whatever status is decided on, it will

come and go, and what will ensue then will last four years during which Serbs in the Albanian-majority environment will not be able to participate in the daily life of their own place of residence. When their survival hinges precisely on doing so...” – author Željka Jevtić, *Blic*, 21/11/2007.); the ethnic identity of Kosovo Serbs and their predicament (*Cyrillic is disappearing in Kosovo*: “The Cyrillic script, as the primary and traditional alphabet of the Serbian community, has all but disappeared in Kosovo and Metohija. It has been effectively removed from public use and can only be seen very rarely.” – Živojin Rakočević, author, *Blic*, 13/12/2011), the issue of Kosovo elections, the status of North Kosovo, conflicts in northern Kosovo (Rexhepi’s war cry: “Such inflammatory statements and similar provocations threaten the fragile peace and stability in the north of Kosovo,” said the President of Serbia, adding that it was very important that EULEX refuted Rexhepi’s claims of its support of such a plan.” – Boris Tadić, Serbian President; *Blic*, 11/7/2010; Thaçi: *Tadić should also bow before those murdered in Kosovo*: “Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi has called on the President of Serbia Boris Tadić to take a bow in remembrance of the victims of Serbian security forces during the war in Kosovo between 1998 and 1999, writes the “Koha Ditore” daily today”. *Blic*, 13/7/2010), the position of the Serbian government on Kosovo elections, to war victims in Kosovo (*Vlasi: Dialogue in both countries’ interest*: “Bidding on the numbers or causes that led to the crimes is inhumane and barbarous. It is a fact that the Serbian government at the time initiated a spiral of violence and led to tragic conflict, it is a fact that the mechanisms of that government and of the state of Serbia persecuted, killed and banished Albanians *en masse* from their homes, it is a fact that Albanians in Kosovo led a war of defense and liberation, and not an anti-Serb war, on its territory, but crimes need to be identified so that the courts can address them.” - Azem Vlasi, lawyer, member of Forum 2015 and president of NGO Kosovo Association for Interethnic Cooperation, *Blic*, 26/9/2010.).

Even though the majority of articles talk about the problems of, above all, the state of Serbia and Serbian citizens in Kosovo, there are also articles that show certain positive examples of these neighbours living together: “Young Albanians: ‘Our wish to visit Belgrade has come true’: The wish of the students of the ‘School of Young Leaders’ from Priština to visit Belgrade has finally come true, thanks to the Youth Initiative for Human Rights.” This news bulletin contains information on the students who did not find it difficult to travel from snowbound Priština at minus five degrees to the Serbian capital, and satisfy their curiosity on the wild nightlife in Belgrade that they had heard so much about.

Elisa Hoxha – final-year student at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Priština: “*Belgrade is such a beautiful city and, it seems to me, very convenient for living. I feel free here. The strongest prejudice that I have heard before coming to Belgrade is that there is great intolerance towards Albanians. These stories about hatred are spread by the people whose judgement is influenced by political life. The young in Priština do not think that way either. I have Serbian female friends, but I can’t see why that would be important, they’re simply my friends.*”

Artan Murati –law student: “*I have a lot of friends from Kosovo Polje. We gather together every Sunday to play football. There might be some intolerance in smaller places, but not in Priština. I see that the situation is similar in Belgrade.*” (*Blic*, 21 October 2010)

Another subtopic that we observed within ethnic identification relates to the *different images* of Serbia, which are either created by Serbs themselves or by “outsiders”, and which, expectedly, can be positive or negative. In total, thirty-three pieces of news relate to this topic, which is important because of the problems with identification and self-identification of Serbs in the period of wars in the Balkans, i.e., endogamous and exogamous identification. During this period, Serbs were presented in the West in a manner that frustrated the citizens of Serbia. On the one hand, they were identified among the Balkan peoples as the culprits in the majority of conflicts, while on the other hand, the perception of ethnic Serbs was based on the experience of injustice and a struggle for survival under difficult conditions (Bakić, 1999). Even during the period observed here, topics such as “Are Serbs the oldest European people?” emerged, although such discourse was most characteristic of the 1990s:

*Do we study in schools from the textbooks that were written on the basis of scientific research or is it all just a matter of an insidious conspiracy organized by the Great Forces and the “Nordic-Berlin School”? Did Serbs move into the Balkans in the 7th century, or are they the oldest European people? Many, and not a small number at that, believe in these hypotheses and often advocate them in common conversations by randomly presenting alleged arguments that prove their claims without a doubt. Many blame textbooks for certain ideas on the position and role of Serbs throughout history.* (B. Anđelić. *Blic*, 23 October 2011)

Certain articles deal with well-known self-stereotypes about Serbs as a defiant, proud and bellicose people (Ćirković, 1997), which is a third theme identified in our analysis (“Dačić: *Serbs have always been rebellious, we are the James Dean of the Balkans.*” *Blic*, 9 January 2012), while the dilemma on which domain Serbia belongs to culturally – the East or the West, always remains either in a manifest or a latent form.

Within the topic on ethnic boundaries, twenty-nine pieces of news encompass subtopics such as national hatred, fascism and nationalism. We identified divisions on the issue of attitudes toward violence against athletes based on the color of their skin or their nationality (*Football hooligans beat up, threaten and intimidate*: the author of the text reports critically on explanations, offered by local government officials, of violence against a football player of African descent “as the consequence of youthful transgressions or as isolated acts of irresponsible individuals, claiming that there is nothing in Čačak that could be characterized as racism or extremism”, *Blic*, 27/9/2007; *Mean Machine – Poster proclamations*: “It looks like someone in this country, but also in our city, is hell-bent on doing away with the stands, and with the fans, because, after last year’s arrests of a large number of Borac supporters, there are now new arrests of Serbian youth. These arrests are done at random, and



the penalties are draconian. They have also been arresting Serbian flags at stadiums throughout Serbia, but not the Turkish ones, which are flown at every Novi Pazar game. How can it be that the harshest penalties are now being demanded for us by those same people in the administration whose party leader once threatened to cut off the hand that dares unfurl a Turkish flag in Raska”, *Blic*: 23/8/2008.), as well as for reactions to instances of ethnic discrimination directed against the Roma (*Jakšić offends Roma*: Democratic Party of Serbia MP Marko Jakšić said that Batić did not come to the session in order to defend Kosovo, but instead “attended in order to provoke with his Roma and Gypsy mentality”; Vladan Batić, the president of the Christian Democratic Party of Serbia at the time, responded to this by calling Jakšić’s words “fascistoid ideas”, insisting this was “no momentary lapse of judgment, but a position, principle and manner, a whole outlook”, *Blic*, 27/9/2007).

When it comes to ethnic affiliation as a key to divisions, frequent discussion on this topic can be encountered in the *Kurir* daily newspaper, as well. Thirty-seven articles are dedicated to this topic. Serbs are contrasted with Croats, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Roma, Albanians, and there is even talk of the assimilation of Romanians in one article. Emerging problems are related to the language and script of Serbs in Croatia, current events and ethnic tensions (*Embargo increases tension between Serbs and Albanians*; *Low numbers of Roma in kindergartens*; *Montenegrins drive Serbs from the beach*; *Stoning of the Croatian Embassy in Belgrade*; *Serbian entertainers: Tereza, shame on you! Farce: Montenegrin language gets interpreters in Serbian courts*). The articles provide information on current problems (confrontations on the topic of the use of the Cyrillic script in Croatia, trade relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the Croatian singer Tereza Kesovija holding a concert in Belgrade despite previously vowing never again to perform there, etc.) and show that relationships with all the minorities in Serbia, with neighbouring peoples and those who Serbs were in conflict with during this period remain in flux.

The most frequently discussed problem is Kosovo and the position of Serbs and “Serbian holy places” in Kosovo (*Kosovo is not Serbia’s neighbour*; *Thaçi’s butcher: I did not remove Serbs’ organs*; *Persecution of Serbs*; *Candles burning for murdered Kosovo Serbs*; *Serbs protest construction of houses for Albanians*; *Serbian cup in Kosovo is not a provocation*; *Gave himself away: Hashim Thaçi speaks Serbian*; *Haradinaj admits: I killed Serbs and Albanians*; *Ecumenical Patriarch: Kosovo is the historic cradle of Serbs*). The other important topic is that of Serbian refugees from Croatia and the Republic of Srpska. In this newspaper, directed towards the broadest audience, one can observe incendiary rhetoric (such as the exiling of Serbs, or organ theft from Serbs by Thaçi’s men) insisting on the dangers Serbs are faced with and on Kosovo as a mythological homeland.

Ethnic belonging and ethnic divisions are topics that draw the greatest attention in *Danas* as well. Not fewer than 253 articles relate to various aspects of ethnic relationships in Serbia, as well as on the territory of former Yugoslavia. In this newspaper they are discussed in an analytical manner.

Distinctive subtopics include: the *issue of Kosovo* (the recognition of Kosovo, negotiations, ethnic incidents, etc., found in ninety-three pieces of news or thirty-

seven per cent of articles that deal with Kosovo). News related to Kosovo is present throughout the observed period, while topics shift depending on the unfolding of events and the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo. During 2007, the discussion was oriented towards the status of Kosovo, with titles showing the unconciliatory position of Kosovo Serbs – *Serbs will never give up on Kosovo. If a solution is forced upon them, they have the right to self-determination*; however, other attitudes can be found as well: *Belgrade is not completely clear on the issue of Kosovo*. After the declaration of Kosovo independence in 2008, articles follow the non-recognition of Kosovo by Serbia's neighbours and other countries. Then, the issue of the position of Serbs in Kosovo is evoked as a very important topic. Crime trials, nationalism, but also attempts at coexistence are present as topics. Mythology related to Kosovo and its importance for Serbs is discussed as well:

*Kosovo's recent declaration of independence has rocked the very foundations of Serbian statehood in both idea and praxis, and shattered the confidence of an otherwise triumphalist-prone people. The mood has ranged from despair, to dismay, to easily diagnosable nationwide PTSD, to aggressive outbursts of hatred. Indeed, history has made a genuine mockery of the Serbian myth of Kosovo, but the traumatized people infatuated with the blood-drenched hallowed ground of its ancestors haven't realized this yet, too busy hating its current inhabitants with a passion. (28/3/2008, Myth and hatred - Peter Kuzmič).*

In the same newspaper we found twenty-nine pieces of news that covered the topic *Images of Serbia*, which is eleven per cent of all news comprising the category of ethnic belonging. On the one hand, the Images of Serbia present Serbia as a country with no prospects and with wrong value orientations, where it is impossible to live safely and peacefully. There, Serbs are described as wild, distraught, triumphalism-prone, traumatized, educationally neglected, small, frustrated and insignificant people<sup>8</sup>:

*I find it difficult after four years of quiet life among the benevolent Austrians to return to my wild Serbians, to their crazy arguments, to them lunging at each other. (Bogdan Bogdanović. "I find it difficult to return: Time Machine 1997 – 2007." Danas, 7 February 2007)*

On the other hand, descriptions emerge that renounce the existence of a "folk mentality", which are used to explain the objective causes of certain behaviours or the general state:

*In fact, there is no such thing as "folk mentality" that would be good or bad, but only a series of historical conditions in which various peoples have lived and which have*

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<sup>8</sup> Since the beginning of the twentieth century, such characterization of Balkan peoples is not at all rare. It has been part of the Western discourse on the Balkans and the peoples inhabiting this peninsula (Todorova, 2009), and as such has been reproduced among its members in the manner illustrated in the excerpt. The term balkanization is used not only to denote processes of fragmentation of what were until then territorial wholes, but also to refer to processes defined as a return to or reawakening of archaic forms of social life - "reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (Todorova, 2009: 3).



*shaped them the way they are...* (Neven Cvetičanin, "On railway track thieves." *Danas*, 2 November 2009).

There are also attempts at explanations that lead directly to certain social groups, organizations or perhaps individuals who have greatly influenced the formation and preservation of conditions in which people live. Furthermore, there is direct confrontation in the positions from which history is observed, a bipolar image of Serbia, a division into *Us* and *Them*, where the ones suspect the others of ulterior motives, of the promotion of certain ideologies, while presenting themselves as objective:

*During the time of the Eighth Plenary Session, Serbia asked for equality in the federation. Twenty years later, Serbia is the most unequal of all the Yugoslav republics, today states or statelets. All of the republics have gained independence and the peoples have created their own states of sorts after the horrible war troubles and crimes. Only Serbia is still an incomplete state twenty years later.* (Momčilo Pavlović. "Serbia remains an incomplete state." *Danas*, 22–23 September 2007)

Within this topic we can single out the subtopic of *national hatred, fascism and nationalism*, covered by seventy articles (twenty-eight per cent). An important part comprises news that discusses the position of Roma in Serbia and the attitudes towards them (twenty articles – fifteen explicitly talking about Roma, while in the remaining five they appear as one of the ethnic minorities). Certainly, these are dominated by the issue of violence and discrimination against Roma:

*He apologized to Roma for the offence caused when he told Batić that he did not attend the session in order to defend Kosovo but to provoke people "with his Romani and Gypsy mentality".* (Marko Jakšić. "An incident in the Parliament." *Danas*, 27 September 2007)

What also stands out as a subtopic is *the relationship with the surrounding countries – Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro*. Since the dominant topics deal with national relations primarily towards the countries in the region, we have split this topic into the relationship with Croatia, the relationship with Bosnia, the relationship with Montenegro, and the relationship with others. Such a division is not arbitrary; on the contrary, the results demonstrate that the articles are equally distributed in such a typology, and that the lowest number of texts relate to the relationship with others. This is also justified by the fact that interethnic relationships with these peoples are more intense due to the burden of the past, filled with wars, territorial tension, convergence, various federations, cohabiting in the same state, etc. Because of this burden of the past in the relationships between these countries, certain events, even those that are not truly significant, can cause one of the sides to react, leading to a chain reaction, predominantly in the political sphere, i.e., diplomatic relations. Judging by the statements quoted in the newspapers, all of this can later on easily result in the reinforcing of existing, slightly forgotten attitudes in the discourse of these actors, or in a deterioration of relations, i.e., as it is usually said with a hint of irony, to the "worsening of the already damaged relations".

However, even though this was to be expected from a newspaper such as *Danas*, this group of news discussion is predominantly centered around post-conflict topics, from the need for cooperation on the resolution of issues of displaced persons, the issue of complete cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, the possibility of cooperation between countries, to the clarification of the adverse effects of the instrumental use of national symbols with the aim of emphasizing differences:

*Politically (state formation) and nationally (cultural identity), it is fully legitimate to have the Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin languages, but to scientifically denounce that it is not one and the same language linguistically is irrational business. (Zoran Panović. "Brenization." *Danas*, 20–21 June 2009)*

Quantitative analysis has indicated that the topics which draw out the lines of ethnic boundaries are predominant. The field of ethnic identities is still the one in which intense struggles with *Others* are taking place, where the self-stereotypes are analysed, and where heterostereotypes are profiled. Making distinctions via categories of ethnicities is a key topic both in the tabloid newspapers and in the mainstream and analytical ones.

## 2.2. Political divisions

Within the division on the basis of **political orientations** there appear several fundamental fronts: democracy vs. authoritarianism; pro-European vs. anti-European forces; transparency vs. non-transparency; cosmopolitanism vs. patriotism. All these dichotomies appear together and in the majority of cases inseparably, as exclusive characteristics (values) in opposition. These topics are discussed in no fewer than sixty articles in *Blic*.

Most often, pro-European orientations are connected with democratic tendencies and open politics, while, contrarily, anti-European political positions emerge hand in hand with nationalistic sentiment, authoritarianism, fascist and right-wing ideology. One should bear in mind that the profile of the latter political orientation is defined by the representatives of the former, since the members of the latter never self-identify using these terms. It is interesting that non-transparency (in leading the state, politics, business activities of state-owned and private companies that are directly or indirectly linked with the political milieu) is not a distinctive characteristic, since it is used by both sides when describing the activities of their opponents.

In the news, democracy is most often mentioned in the context of the power of political forces in Serbia to lead the country through European integration, and ensure political stability and democratic elections. Apart from the direct affirmation of democratic institutions and values, democracy is also discussed through a critique of its absence from the field of politics. Thus, in one article Vesna Pešić, a sociologist, talks about the non-existence of democratic and fair elections in Serbia, while Vladimir Pavićević, a political scientist, lists the following major shortcomings of democracy in Serbia: reduced choice, endangered right to political association and activity, and complete absence of the rule of law.

In this position, one of the more important indicators of the level of democracy in a country is the precondition for its constitution of the issue of the freedom of the media. This is where the democratic capacity of a country to protect and ensure the recognition of human and minority rights is assessed. Contrary to democracy stands authoritarianism, expressed through the unlimited authority of political parties. The actors of the evaluation of activities in the political scene, apart from being labelled by the opposing parties, are political analysts and university professors – political scientists, who evaluate and categorize activities and ideologies.

As part of this recognizable differentiation, we can identify several sub-topics:

*Patriotism/nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism and pro-European vs. anti-European forces* – within the sixty articles that deal with political divisions in Serbia in the studied period, in the *Blic* newspaper thirty-one articles are dedicated to this type of division on the political scene. This is an obviously very important division in the observed period. Ever since the 1990s and the conflicts in the Balkans, there has been a division into those who advocate national interests and those who are “traitors” in Serbia. This has always matched the division into pro-European and anti-European forces, which have found their stronghold in the right-wing forces that have always had a robust presence on the political scene, until the most recent shift saw the explicitly nationalist parties taking a pro-European stance. In Serbia there used to exist two clearly delineated political paths:

*The first comprises the Radicals as the classic nationalistic right and related parties of the right centre (DPS and NS). The other block consists of the parties of the left political centre and the centre (DP, G17 Plus and other coalition partners). The main “demarcation line” between the Euro-democratic and the national-people’s blocks in our circumstances is not the character of the socio-economic system that they promote, but the relation towards European integration of Serbia and the manner in which the Kosovo issue is to be addressed in the future (Blic, 28 March 2008).*

Along the *transparent/non-transparent* line, there is a certain equality between the stances of the authors of different news (or their conversational partners). The link between the state and the parties, on the one hand, and the economic powerhouses, on the other, emerges as the main characteristic of non-transparency. These links are visible in the non-transparent presentation of the financial sources of the biggest political parties. As an illustration, the president of “Transparency Serbia”, Vladimir Goati, pointing to this problem, says that *the Serbian Government should show more determination in endorsing the work of independent institutions that fight against corruption and harmonizing the system with other democratic countries. The problem lies, as he says, in the fact that political parties see social institutions as their prey* (“They use the budget as their party’s till.” *Blic*, 27 October 2010). This division is most often related to the activities of political parties (financing and expenditure, particularly during election campaigns), but also to the work of the government and specific ministers, state institutions and officials:

*For some time now the story about the merciless draining of public companies has been going on. Parties place their dignitaries in them and through them collect the*

*revenue uncontrollably. If it had not been for the persistent journalists and aggressive opposition, many would still be hiding behind trade secrets.* (Mihal Ramač. “Public milking of the sacred cow.” *Danas*, 29–30 November 2008)

The articles also point to the need to establish institutional mechanisms for the control of economic flow, as preconditions for transparency and political accountability.

Political divisions, confrontation, and the struggle to impose one’s own cultural model appear thirty times in the studied period in *Kurir*. What is discernible in this area is the confrontation between the three types of Serbia: the First – nationalist, conservative, rural, anti-European Serbia, aligned with Milošević at first, and with the Serbian Radical Party later (especially its leaders Šešelj, Nikolić and Vučić), as well as, in the period analysed here, with the Democratic Party of Serbia with its leader, at the time the architect of anti-European politics (e.g., Koštunica led the procession against the Brussels agreement, LDP, DP and URS to endorse the Brussels agreement). The Second Serbia, defined as civic, cosmopolitan, urban, oriented toward EU integration and represented by the Democratic Party (Serbia), is only present implicitly, in particular via narratives used to construct a portrait of the Third Serbia, primarily by ascribing certain aspects of the Second Serbia to “former” actors in the First Serbia, who are now trying to claim the domain of the Third Serbia (“Vučić is like Đinđić! A decisive break from the past, a joint step towards the EU”)<sup>9</sup>. One can also identify important topics around which standpoints are organized in the following: the Kosovo issue (*Stefanović: some in the north of Kosovo do not grasp reality*), the Brussels agreement, the relation between small and big parties, manoeuvring between the USA and Russia. Throughout the entire period one can also observe the opposition between the two strongest parties in Serbia, the Serbian Progressive Party and the Democratic Party (*SPP: Đilas and his doctors from DP sucked the life out of Serbia; Progressives destroyed democrats and leaguers; Croats reduced to Tadić! Provincial government robbed Serbia, now tearing the country apart; Gašić: Đilas, you from DP are liars, my degree is from a state faculty*). What is dominant here are topics related to different political orientations and ethnic belonging. Similarly to *Blic*, these topics are ubiquitous in *Kurir* as well.

In the *Danas* daily newspaper, political struggles and confrontation occupy an important position as well – 170 articles. In comparison with the other two analysed newspapers, subtler debates are heard in this case. The image is not as oversimplified and directed only towards the most important actors on the political scene, but also relates to social issues and their importance for social life. For example, one focus is on the protection of the rights of vulnerable social groups:

*The Croatian Bunjevac-Šokac Party: By the latest decree of the Serbian Government on abolishing the subsidies to persons over the age of 79, their human and civil rights are denied, thus not acknowledging the contribution that they made as agricultural producers, which is obviously a case of discrimination based on age, and any type*

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<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth academic study of the discursive construction of the Third Serbia as an alternative to the stark division between the First and Second Serbia, please see: Spasić, Petrović, 2012; 2013.

*of discrimination is not permitted by our Constitution. ("Decree on the register of agricultural land is discriminatory." Danas, 29 May 2009)*

Another set of articles speaks of the conflicts and oppression due to disagreement on basic social values:

*The raid by the party thugs in the Novi Sad Youth Theatre announced the beginning of the pre-election campaign in the capital. Belgrade streets echo with the voices that say that, apart from the bad, there are also good radicals, such as the mayor of Novi Sad. She would have prevented the violence, but the party would not let her do it. If the radicals win in the capital, all of the theatres will be assigned party troopers for directors. The repertoire will be decided by masked men using bats. The director, however, was not a radical. The radicals elected him following the recommendation by DPS. (Mihalj Ramač. "A C for D students." Danas, 10–11 February 2007)*

When we examine the analysed articles in terms of their content, two more topics stand out as significant.

*Authoritarianism vs. democracy*, forty-two articles i.e., twenty-five per cent: Democracy is most often mentioned in relation to the issue of compromised human rights and freedoms, followed by favouring personal or party interests to the detriment of general wellbeing and civic interest, and, finally, very frequently "in a package" with European values (political and civil freedoms, social equality, liberal market) and integration. This vision of democratic values and institutions stands opposed to the totalitarian and authoritarian tendencies of certain parts of the public, state institutions, civil associations or ideas by individuals.

*Patriotism/nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism, and pro-European vs. anti-European forces*: A large number of articles in this area relate directly to the issue of European integration and the future status of Serbia with regard to the EU, whether it will become a member state or not, what the main preconditions are that need to be met (fifty articles, i.e., forty-eight per cent of the news on this topic). Here, foreign officials appear through giving support to pro-European governments or reforms, and promoting new conditions or strengthening the old ones as necessary for a serious consideration for membership. Furthermore, domestic politicians also speak positively of the changes that lead to the EU and the importance of drawing nearer to the values and institutions of the European Union.

*Serbia finds itself in a decisive moment in which it needs to make a decision on whether it will follow the path of modernization, development and European integration, or the one of closing in and arresting development, and history shows us that we were always on the losing side whenever we decided not to accept what was being proposed to us by the world. The previous two centuries saw the downfall of all modernist attempts in Serbia, and we can conclude that the establishment of a democratic order will only be possible when the civil rises above the national, the autonomous above the unitary, and the ideas of freedom and democracy above the ideas of authoritarianism and subservience (Čedomir Čupić. "Serbia as a difficult society." Danas, 10–11 February 2007).*

## 4. Conclusions

Even though the editorial policies of the observed daily newspapers (2006–2013) differ, as we have stated at the beginning, we were still able to identify a trend, namely that each of them was dominated by ethnic and political divisions. It is clear that during this period Serbia was still divided along those lines and that there were no oscillations regarding the presence of such topics throughout the entire period, as well as regarding their importance in relation to other social debates that feature to a lesser extent (quality of life, gender relations, social issues).

Despite the fact that Serbia is mostly ethnically homogeneous today (83.32% Serbs, 2011 census), the issue of ethnic confrontation is still present. The foremost issue is that of Kosovo, which has not been resolved yet. Also present is the identity crisis within the endogenous and exogenous identification after the period in which Serbs were marked as the “bad guys” of the world. The debate remains open, both in Serbia and outside the country. The analysis also shows that the relations with surrounding nations will remain a subject of confrontation and symbolic struggles for a long time.

Political divisions are also conspicuous and significant. One can observe the dynamics and shifts in certain political actors from one end of value orientations to the opposite one. The divisions remain, while the actors gather from one side to the other depending on their own role – position/opposition. In line with Pavlović’s (2006) characterization of political struggle as a *par excellence* form of symbolic struggle for the preservation or transformation of the social world, we can state that in the case of the analysed newspapers it is, in fact, a form of symbolic struggle for one’s own preservation of authority, in which actors use inherent meanings of their own discursive codes, that is, employ the categories that in the code in question have a positive connotation in the characterization of their own positions, while using the categories with a negative connotation in the characterization of *Others*.

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## SIMBOLIČKE BORBE U SRBIJI – ANALIZA SADRŽAJA DNEVNIH NOVINA U PERIODU OD 2006-2013. GODINE

**Apstrakt.** *Savremeno srpsko društvo je podeljeno na mnogo načina. Društvene grupe se bore za nametanje svog vrednosnog sistema i kulturnog okvira u cilju kontrolisanja društvenih resursa i usmeravanja društvenog razvoja na osnovu sopstvenih preferencija i interesa. Neke podele su vidljivije od drugih, poput onih političkih, dok neke nisu u toj meri transparentne, ali učestvuju u raspodeli snaga u društvenom polju. Ovo je naročito bio slučaj u vreme duboke podeljenosti na „prvu“ i „drugu“ Srbiju (Spasić & Petrović, 2013). U periodu koji je predmet analize (2006-2013.), Srbija postaje samostalna država i učvršćuje se prividni konsenzus oko prihvatanja evropskih vrednosti, evropskog puta Srbije i mirne budućnosti. Podele nakon regresije nacionalističkih snaga na javnoj sceni u Srbiji nisu tako jasno uočljive kao u prethodnom periodu pre nego je došlo do deklarativnog, a moglo bi se reći delom i "tatkickog", ujedinjavanja političkih snaga u pogledu puta ka EU. U radu je učinjen pokušaj da se preko analize sadržaja dnevnih listova u period (2006-2013.) skiciraju osnovne linije simboličkih borbi u savremenom srpskom društvu. Kako je analizom obuhvaćen duži period ispitana su glavna težišta borbe, kao i određene pravilnosti u ovim kretanjima. U cilju celovitijeg obuhvata, u analizu su uključena tri dnevna lista sa različitim ciljnim grupama i uređivačkim politikama. Nalazi ukazuju na dominantno prisustvo simboličkih borbi u političkoj areni, kao i u oblasti etničkih odnosa. Ovaj trend se održava tokom čitavog posmatranog perioda.*

**Cljučne reči:** *simboličke borbe, etnički odnosi, političke borbe, nacionalizam, klasifikacija, Mi i Oni*



## **THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' DIGITAL COMPETENCIES IN THE COMMUNICATION DOMAIN<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract:** *Our time is the time of rapid changes in all walks of life. The fastest changing segment is that of digital technologies. As the development of digital technologies is a current and continuous process, it is expected that in time these technologies will become completely integrated into the school practice. Therefore, it is important to observe if the students are ready and to what extent they are equipped to apply digital tools in education. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish whether students possess digital competencies which will become necessary if one wishes to keep up with the teaching process and complete school assignments or if students' digital competencies are related to spending leisure time on content that is unrelated to school assignments. The paper researches digital competencies of secondary school students in the communication domain. We strived to establish the level of students' digital competencies necessary to communicate through digital technologies, and differences in the level of students' digital competencies bearing in mind their academic achievements, sex, and form. The results of the conducted research indicate that the largest number of students have mastered the basic and intermediate levels of digital competencies in the communication domain, but one cannot disregard the number of students who are advanced users in this domain. When it comes to differences in participants' responses in terms of research variables, it has been established that there are statistically significant differences concerning sex and academic achievement, while there are no established statistical differences in regard to their form.*

**Keywords:** *digital competencies, students, communication, digital technologies*

### **1. Introduction**

In the modern world, communication is increasingly moving to the electronic domain and it is established through digital technologies. New generations cannot imagine their lives without mobile phones, the Internet, and other efficient means of communication. New technologies have become indispensable to the point that they constitute the be-all and end-all of efficient communication in everyday life.

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The pandemic which has spread all over the world contributed to setting out digital competencies as essential for functioning within the scope of the educational system, as well as in all other segments which imply direct contact and communication.

To increase the efficiency of the process of education in the era dominated by digital technologies it is necessary to start from research into students' digital competencies to pinpoint the knowledge which needs to be improved. As the use of digital technologies has changed over time, so has competence development, and it has become necessary to explore them continuously.

Digital technologies have facilitated communication and enabled its uninterrupted flow regardless of the location of interlocutors. Digital technologies in general, and especially those in the communication domain are extremely significant, which requires constant exploration and improvement. In the research, we started from the assumption that students possess a high level of digital competencies in the communication domain. We can support such a stance by referring to the full online teaching process which was initiated in March 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, in addition to communicating via messages students were compelled to learn how to share files, as well as how to communicate through digital tools which they had not used before.

## 2. Theoretical approach to the problem

In the Serbian language, the term *competency* is translated as *kompetencija* and it is understood as a set of behaviors that contribute to the successful completion of certain activities as well as a manner of applying acquired knowledge and skills when performing a certain task (Kurz & Bartram, 2002). Defined on a more general level, the term competency can be determined as “competence, authority, ability” (Vujaklija, 1980:429).

Nevertheless, one of the major problems in defining competencies is the fact that different authors attach different meanings and content to this concept, while their manner of measuring the development of competencies in individuals differs as well. Mulder (2007) has extensively dealt with the development of the concept of competency and its meaning in the existing literature and he points out that the concept of competency and the use of words relating to competencies dates back to Persia, Rome, and Ancient Greece. In Europe, this concept can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it can be found in legal literature, organisational structure, management processes, and education. Observed from the aspect of the manifestation of competencies, literature offers definitions of competencies which can be classified into two groups (Branković, 2011; Domazet, 2009; Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003; Jenkins et al, 2007; Kurz & Bartram, 2002; Mijatović, 2000; Mulder, 2007; Witfelt, 2000). The first group includes definitions related to the qualifications or standards of performing an activity, while the second group includes definitions that relate to a high level of success in performing a certain activity.

Within the framework of the project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, 30 key generic competencies have been identified and classified into three groups: 1)

instrumental, 2) interpersonal and 3) systemic competencies (Gonzales & Wagenaar, 2003). *Instrumental* competencies include the following: the ability to analyse and synthesise, the ability to organise and plan; oral and written communication in one's native language; basic general knowledge; knowledge of a specific field; knowledge of a foreign language, problem-solving, etc. *Interpersonal* competencies include the ability of criticism and self-criticism, teamwork, interpersonal skills, respect for diversity, while *systemic* competencies include the ability to learn and apply the knowledge in practice, creativity, leadership, research skill, the ability to adjust to new situations, the will to succeed, etc.

The European Reference Framework on Key Competencies (The European Parliament & The European Union, 2006) understands digital competencies as safe and discriminating use of information society technologies for work, free time, and communication, and it is supported by basic information technology skills such as the use of a computer to seek, assess, produce, present and exchange information to participate and communicate through the Internet. Competencies have been developed at three levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced by precisely explaining the expectations related to students' achievements at each level. These competencies should enable students to respond to various life challenges, to become competent to successfully apply different types of knowledge, attitudes, and skills acquired during the period of formal education.

Digital competencies are increasingly becoming essential competencies and they permeate all spheres of life. They are implemented in everyday educational practice, study programmes, curriculum, work, further education, and retraining whereby the scope of professional development programmes has not yet reached a satisfactory level. Since digital competencies are not related to any particular subject and they are considered interdisciplinary competencies, one frequently encounters situations in practice where students are required to solve tasks which imply good digital skills, whereby they had not been previously taught techniques and methods of developing such competencies (Krželj & Polovina, 2019). Changes related to the world of digital technologies are inevitable and it is necessary to constantly adjust and improve one's skills, which especially relates to the field of education and its stakeholders. This is especially important in order to be able to keep up with the generations which start attending school with increasing information technology literacy and to be able to take as many advantages of the digital age as possible. The current formal traditional education which implies that knowledge is transferred in a finished form from a lecturer to a student is not adequate in a society prone to constant and quick changes, i.e., in a society where information changes and knowledge becomes obsolete if it is not upgraded with new knowledge and skills.

Information and communication technologies have facilitated everyday life by making jobs faster and simpler, but they have also brought numerous changes which are not always desirable. With the advancement of technology, we bear witness to the mass use of the Internet which has already been included in the process of education and upbringing. When it comes to the Internet, the most important segment of Internet use is to teach students how to access web pages suited to their needs and how to recognise

unsafe content. It is necessary to point to various possibilities of using computers and the Internet for educational purposes because such uses are manifold and students should also be trained to benefit the most out of what they offer. The content encountered on the Internet is usually not properly evaluated or critically assessed. The focus should be placed on training students to use technologies adequately and efficiently to educate themselves, as well as to develop digital competencies, to develop their professional knowledge and improve themselves.

In Serbia, in 2013 the Standards of General Cross-Curricular Competencies in the End of Secondary Education (2013) were developed, including digital competencies. Digital competencies have been defined through the following outcomes: a student can search for, assess reliability, and analyse information in an electronic form by resorting to suitable ICT tools (devices, software products, and e-services); the student can express himself/herself in an electronic form by resorting to multimedia expression and with elements of formally defined notations characteristics of the use of ICT tools (for instance address, queries, formulae, procedures, etc.); the student can resort to ICT to present, organise, structure and format information; when solving problems the student is capable of choosing suitable ICT tools; the student can efficiently use the ICT to communicate and cooperate; the student recognises the risks and dangers when using the ICT. Based on the aforementioned, one can observe similarities with the definition of digital competencies reached in the framework of the DigiComp project, so the outcomes embraced by the Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education and Upbringing can be classified into five previously mentioned fields of digital competencies: information and digital literacy, communication and cooperation, creating digital content, safety and problem-solving.

Digital competencies according to users' development levels have been categorised into five areas: information processing, communication in the digital environment, creating digital content, safety in the digital environment, and problem-solving. Bearing in mind that this paper deals with communication in the digital environment, only this domain of digital competencies will be presented in the table (Table 1) (<https://europass.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/EuropassIctGrid-SRlat.pdf>).

**Table 1** Self-assessment of digital competencies in the communication domain

COMMUNICATION	
Basic use	I can communicate with others by using a mobile phone, e-mail, or chat applications – by using basic functions (for instance, voice messages, text messages, sending and receiving e-mails). I can share files or content by using simple tools.  I know I can use digital technologies for various services (such as public institutions, banks, hospitals...). I am familiar with social media and tools for Internet cooperation. I am familiar with certain rules that need to be abided by when using certain digital tools (for instance, sharing comments, sharing personal data).
Independent use	I can use advanced options of several communication tools. I can use cooperation tools and contribute to shared files made by someone else. I can use certain options of Internet services (for instance, public institution services, e-banking, online shopping). I transfer or share knowledge with others on the Internet (for instance, via social media or in various Internet communities). I am familiar with communication rules on the Internet ( <i>Internet etiquette/netiquette</i> ) and I abide by them.

Advanced use I actively use a wide variety of tools for Internet communication (e-mail, chatting, short messages, instant messages, blogs, microblogs, social media). I can create content and manage it through collaboration tools (for instance, e-calendar, project management systems, online text correction, Internet table). I actively participate in Internet spaces and I use several e-services (for instance, public institution services, e-banking, online shopping).

I can use advanced tools for communication (for instance, video conference, data sharing, application sharing).

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As we have dealt in this paper with the communication domain within the scope of development of digital competencies, we should emphasise the concept of communication as an interdisciplinary competence that can contribute to the development of digital competencies within this domain. This competence implies that a student has mastered various modalities of communication and uses them purposefully and constructively when he/she communicates in a private, public, educational and professional context. The student adapts the manner and means of communication to the characteristics of the situation, he/she uses concepts suitably and creatively, as well as the language and communication style which are specific for different scientific, technical, and artistic disciplines. In communication with others, the student can express his/her opinion, emotions, attitudes, values, and accomplish his/her goals in a positive, constructive, and argumentative way, by respecting the other side (Standards of General Cross-Curricular Competencies in the End of Secondary Education, 2013). Digital competence in the communication domain enables one to establish social roles and it implies inclusion into social activities via the Internet. It is achieved by interaction through digital technologies, by content sharing, managing digital identity, and collaborating (Kluzer & Priego, 2018).

### **3. Methodological framework**

Bearing in mind that digital competencies are increasingly prominent among the 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies and that they have become indispensable in every sphere of life and work, this research aims to examine the readiness of students to use digital technologies which are becoming highly present in education. The subject of this research is the level of development of students' digital competencies in the domain of communication. The paper aims to determine the level of digital competencies in secondary school students.

The following research tasks arise from the set goal:

1. To establish the level of students' digital competencies for communication via digital technologies.
2. To establish whether there is a statistically significant difference in students' responses concerning the level of digital competencies in the communication domain in relation to students' sex.
3. To establish the relation between students' assessment of the level of digital competencies in the communication domain and students' academic

achievements.

4. To establish whether there is a significant difference in students' responses about the level of digital competencies in the domain of communication in terms of the school form that they attend.

The research hypotheses which stem from the research goal are as follows:

1. It is assumed that students are at the level of an independent use of digital competencies for communication through digital technologies.
2. It is assumed that there is a statistically significant correlation between students' assessment regarding their level of digital competencies in the communication domain and their academic achievement.
3. It is expected that there is a statistically significant difference in students' responses regarding their level of digital competencies in the communication domain in terms of their sex.
4. It is expected that there is a statistically significant difference in students' responses regarding the level of digital competencies in terms of the school form that they attend.

In the research, we have resorted to the descriptive method. The applied research technique is scaling. By resorting to scaling as well as by applying the Likert-type scale we examined students' self-assessment of the levels of digital competencies. The basic theoretical standpoint for devising this instrument is found in the classification of digital competencies provided in DigiCom 1.0 (*A Framework for Developing and Understanding Digital Competence in Europe*) published by the European Commission in 2013 (according to Ferrari, 2013). This classification of digital competencies was used to create an assessment scale with items adjusted to the needs of this research. The instrument included 30 items covering three levels (basic, independent and advanced) of digital competencies from different domains. This paper presents results from the communication domain, whereby the data were collected by resorting to a 6-item subscale.

The data have been processed by using the SPSS software package for Windows 2.0. The research variables are as follows: sex, secondary school forms, and students' academic achievement. The following statistical procedures have been applied: a) to compare respondents concerning the sex variable we resorted to the t-test; b) to compare respondents concerning the school form they attended we used the one-factor analysis of variance; c) to establish the relationship between academic achievement and levels of digital competencies in the communication domain we resorted to correlation. The results are presented in tables and text form.

The research encompassed 103 secondary school students who live in the student dormitory – 44 students were male and 59 of the female sex. When it comes to academic achievement, as one can observe in Table 2, 57,3% of students have excellent achievement, 30,1% have very good achievement, 11,7% have good achievement and 1,9% have average achievement. The sample is fairly uniform concerning the representation of students of all forms, 30,1% attends the first form, 20,4% attends the second form, 27,2% attends the third form and 22,3% attends the fourth form.

**Table 2** Sample structure

Variables			
Sex	Male	f	44
		%	42,7
	Female	f	59
		%	57,3
Academic achievement	Excellent	f	59
		%	57,3
	Very good	f	31
		%	30,1
	Good	f	12
		%	10,7
	Average	f	1
		%	1,9
	First	f	31
		%	30,1
	Second	f	21
		%	20,4
Secondary school form	Third	f	28
		%	27,2
	Fourth	f	23
		%	22,3

#### 4. Analysis of research results

The first research task was related to establishing the level of students' digital competencies in the communication field. All students agreed (summarised categories *I agree* and *I totally agree*) with the statement that they were able to communicate with others by using a mobile phone, e-mail, and chat applications. When it comes to the second statement concerning the basic level (they can resort to digital devices in order to use public institution services), 80% of students expressed their agreement (every fifth student totally agrees), while 12% of the students were indecisive, and 8% disagreed. Most students (around 90%) agreed with the statements that they knew how to share files via social media and e-mail (independent level) and that they actively used different tools to communicate using the Internet (advanced level). A somewhat smaller number of students stated that they knew how to use the Internet to shop online or to resort to e-banking (independent level) – around 70%, while



65% of them resorted to online shopping and used the services of public institutions (advanced level), and 20% expressed their disagreement with this statement.

Through an advanced research task, we wanted to establish whether there was a statistically significant difference in students' responses with regards to their levels of digital competence in the communication domain and taking into consideration their sex. By calculating the t-test of independent samples, it has been ascertained that there were statistically significant differences between the members of the male and female sex. Based on presented results in Table 3, female students assessed that they possessed a higher level of competencies in the communication domain in comparison to male students.

**Table 3** Statistical significance of the difference in responses concerning the sex variable

Scale/Domain	Sex	N	AM	SD	t	p
Communication	male	44	23.48	3.34	-2.386	0.019*
	female	59	25.02	3.16		

Note: N – number of respondents, AM – arithmetic mean, SD – standard deviation, t – statistic, p – statistical significance  
\* significance on the level 0.05.

By comparing students in terms of the level of digital competence in the communication domain concerning the forms they attended we have reached the data which show that there is no statistically significant difference in their responses based on results presented in Table 4.

**Table 4** Statistical significance of the difference in responses concerning the form variable

Scale/Domain	Sum of squares	df	Average square	F	p
Between groups	22.145	3	7.382	0.666	0.575
Communication Within groups	1097.564	99	11.087		
Total	1119.709	102			

Note: df – degrees of freedom, F – statistic, p – statistical significance

The correlation between academic achievement and levels of digital competencies in the communication domain has been established based on the results of correlational analysis (Table 5). The results show that there is a moderate correlation between academic achievement and a level of digital competence in the communication domain ( $r=0.323$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), i.e., that students with higher academic achievement also have a higher level of competencies.

**Table 5** Correlation between academic achievements and the score of digital competence on a scale/domain of communication

		Communication
Academic achievement	Pearson Correlation	0.323**
	Sig.	0.001
	N	103

Note: Spearman’s rho – statistic, Sig. – statistical significance, N – number of respondents  
\*\* significance on the level of 0.01.

Based on the obtained results, one can conclude that students possess high levels of digital competence in the communication domain. Taking into consideration all other domains of digital competence such as information processing, content creation, safety, and problem-solving, one can assert that it is expected that students possess high levels of competence precisely in the communication domain.

#### 4.1. Discussion

Students’ digital competencies are among interdisciplinary competencies that should be developed in the framework of all school subjects. The development of these competencies implies building students’ capacities to successfully cope with the digital world in which we currently live and work. Students should be introduced to positive and negative aspects of digital technologies to be able to adequately exploit them.

Contrary to certain research studies results, the authors of this research concluded that there was no significant difference in students’ responses with regards to their sex. The results of other research studies that delved into students’ digital competencies showed that female students possessed a higher level of digital competencies compared to male students (Gebhardt et al., 2019; Punter, Meelissen & Glas, 2017; Fraillon et al., 2019). However, there are opposite findings which indicate that male students are digitally more competent than female students (Kuzmanović et al., 2019).

When it comes to differences relating to the form that students attend, we have also concluded that there was no statistically significant correlation between students’ responses to the statement relating to the communication domain of digital competencies. Similar results suggesting that there was no correlation between students’ age and one’s level of digital competencies have been reached by other authors as well (e.g., Durndell & Haag, 2002), while other research studies indicate that there are certain differences between junior and senior secondary school students when it comes to theoretical and practical aspects of computer skills (Appel, 2012).

The research has shown that there is a positive correlation between students’ academic achievements and their levels of digital competencies, i.e., the better the academic achievement of students, the higher the level of digital competencies. Such a finding is in line with another study which indicates that the improvement of digital competencies depends on students’ academic achievement (Hatlevik,

Guðmundsdóttir & Loi, 2015). The future brings the inevitability of researching into digital competencies in order to improve the application of new technologies and adequately apply them in the process of education.

## 5. Conclusion

We live in the digital era with the technological revolution in full swing. To be able to keep up with great achievements and changes it is necessary to continuously improve our capabilities and build competencies that will enable us to understand, learn, communicate and work in the digital age. Consequently, the theoretical significance of this research is reflected in the fact that this paper can make a certain contribution to our pedagogical theory within which the development of digital competencies is still in its infancy. Additionally, it can broaden the current theoretical knowledge and provide a starting point for further empirical research into students' digital competencies.

The future brings significant changes, which requires faster development and adjustment to the new circumstances. Communication is of primary importance in every activity and in new challenges that lay ahead. Communicating through digital technologies increasingly becomes the primary way and means of functioning in a modern society and if we fail to develop competencies that could facilitate our functioning in the digital era, we could face serious problems. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness in children about the significance of competencies. By pointing to the purpose and significance of competencies in different fields we can increase motivation for personal and professional improvement and form citizens who can cope with different circumstances which occur in the developing society.

Therefore, we believe that the results obtained in this research can serve as a starting point for taking further steps towards improving digital competencies in students. The necessity to develop and possess competencies points to the significance of lifelong learning. Realistic assessment of one's competencies and working on their improvement leads to forming responsible citizens aware of the necessity of a continuous growth in order to face increasing challenges brought by the advancement of digital technologies. Competencies require continuous reconsideration, opening new possibilities, and creating ideas that would constitute the basis for further research with the aim of further improvement. As a result, the greatest significance of this research is not merely reflected in establishing the levels of digital competencies in students, but in creating the basis for further actions which need to be taken to improve them.

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## RAZVIJENOST DIGITALNIH KOMPETENCIJA UČENIKA U DOMENU KOMUNIKACIJE

**Apstrakt.** *Nalazimo se u vremenu ubrzanih promena u svim sferama života, a segment u kome se najbrže odvijaju promene jeste oblast digitalnih tehnologija. Kako je razvoj digitalnih tehnologija aktuelan i kontinuiran proces, očekuje se da će se vremenom one potpuno integrisati u školsku praksu. Zbog toga je važno sagledati da li su učenici spremni i koliko su osposobljeni za primenu digitalnih alata u obrazovanju. Pored toga, potrebno je utvrditi da li učenici poseduju digitalne kompetencije koje će postati neophodne za praćenje nastave i izradu školskih zadataka ili se digitalne kompetencije koje učenici poseduju odnose na provođenje slobodnog vremena uz sadržaje koji nisu povezani sa školom. U radu se istražuju digitalne kompetencije učenika srednjih škola iz domena komunikacije. Nastojali smo da utvrdimo nivo digitalnih kompetencija učenika za komunikaciju putem digitalnih tehnologija i razlike u nivoima digitalnih kompetencija učenika s obzirom na njihov školski uspeh, pol i razred. Rezultati realizovanog istraživanja pokazuju da je najveći broj učenika ovladao osnovnim i srednjim nivoom digitalnih kompetencija iz domena komunikacije, ali nije zanemarljiv ni broj učenika koji su na naprednom nivou iz ovog domena. Kada je reč o razlikama u odgovorima ispitanika s obzirom na varijable istraživanja, utvrđeno je da postoje statistički značajne razlike u odnosu na pol i školski uspeh učenika, dok u odnosu na razred statistički značajne razlike nisu ustanovljene.*

**Ključne reči:** *digitalne kompetencije, učenici, komunikacija, digitalne tehnologije.*

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## **PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF JOURNALISTS THEN AND NOW: A PERSPECTIVE OF JOURNALISTS FROM SOUTHEAST SERBIA<sup>2, 3, 4, 5</sup>**

**Abstract.** *The journalistic profession has faced many challenges in recent decades. Market pressure, the emergence of non-media actors producing content, and a shrinking audience interested in the news are just some of the challenges that media professionals are facing on a daily basis in the age of convergence culture (Deuze, 2008; Donsbach, 2009; Jenkins, 2008). If we observe these issues in the context of countries that do not have a long democratic tradition, the challenges become even more pronounced, which may result in a decline in this profession's reputation, and even in the loss or crisis of professional identity (Donsbach, 2009). Starting from the structural elements of the professional identity of journalists (Deuze, 2008), an in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with ten journalists employed in different types of media in Niš. In order to be in a position to compare the period before and after the socio-political and technological transition, for which we take the year 2000, all interviewed journalists were born before 1980, and have at least 15 years of experience in journalism. Thematic analysis of the interviews shows that, in the opinion of journalists, the status of journalism as a profession is constantly declining; that the crisis of journalists' identity is caused by commercialization, convergence and market pressure, but that it is the socio-political circumstances that have the greatest impact on the (self) perception of journalism as a profession.*

**Key words:** *identity of journalists, status of journalists, perspective of journalists, southeast of Serbia, in-depth interview*

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, scholars have often focused on the changes in media and professional identity of journalists caused by technological development. Those challenges have indeed made a great impact on media professionals and their everyday work (Malmelin & Villi, 2017; Deuze, Bruns, & Neuburger, 2007). Some authors stress that journalists are losing their role as “gatekeepers” of information and primary definers of news, at least in the way they were before the Internet era. Others argue that journalism as a profession is losing its importance, moreover, it will become insignificant. Many of those standpoints can be summarized by Donsbach’s words: “The problem we are observing with journalism is not a disappearing occupation but a disappearing social function” (2009: 43). In this article we focus on the ‘disappearance of this social function’ by examining changes in the professional identity of journalists in the context of (post)transitional society. We start by briefly outlining approaches to journalistic identity and describing our analytical framework.

As Wolfgang Donsbach noted, “The identity of journalism as a profession lives on the assumption ‘I know it when I see it’” (2009: 38). This line illustrates how many approaches in the research of the journalistic profession exist. We can perceive journalists as mediators who spread objective information and serve the public (*Public Service Tradition*), or as professional communicators who create public opinion by pursuing subjective goals presented as public good (*Subjective Tradition*), or as media industry workers paid to do their job, mainly driven by economic interests (*Commercial Tradition*) (Donsbach, 2009). Either way, we must consider the complexity of their profession, and the multitude of influences on journalism – from technological changes (Deuze, 2008; Jenkins, 2008) to socio-political circumstances, both global and national.

One of the approaches with the longest tradition in journalism studies is based on the functionalist framework. From the functionalist point of view the professional identity of journalists is based on three elements: *ensuring collective cohesion*, *achieving social function* and *creating a common ideology* that reflects on the work of journalists (Le Cam, Pereira & Ruellan, 2019). The functionalist approach has been critiqued primarily because it insists on normative principles, excludes diversity of practice, context, and individual preferences of journalists.

From the 1990, the cultural turn has been noted in journalism studies with the work of Zelizer (1992) and journalistic identity has been observed as part of journalistic cultures across the globe (e.g., Hanitzsch, 2019). In this rich research tradition, journalistic identity is closely connected with journalistic roles understood as “the way journalists perceive, articulate, and enact generalized expectations as to how journalism is serving society, both in normative and descriptive terms” (Hanitzsch 2019: 1). Besides Tomas Hanitzsch’s “Worlds of journalism study” in recent years a comparative research of journalistic role performance has been led by Claudia Mellado (e.g., Mellado et al., 2017). Both large scale comparative projects have contributed to our knowledge about the journalistic profession as



dependent on the context in which it operates and provided valuable insight into the heterogeneity of journalistic identity. Therefore, it can be argued that this approach answers to shortcomings of functionalism, but according to Le Cam, Pereira and Ruellan (2019: 2), “though comparative research addresses the plurality of social roles and conceptions inherent in journalism, journalistic identity remains normative and media-centric”.

Starting from the idea of journalism as a culture which is shaped by socio-political circumstances, as well as the materiality and the contradictions of news production, we apply Deuze’s (2008) structural elements of professional identity, partly modified to the research context, as an analytical framework. According to Deuze (2008), journalism identity consists of: “the status and protection (by law) of the profession, ethical guidelines of one’s organization (if any), budgets, preferred sources (every news organization has its own range of experts), market characteristics, set routines and rituals on the work floor, ownership” (p. 112). We apply this framework to examine the changes in the professional identity of journalists in Serbia since the democratic transition which started in 2000.

## **2. Previous research about the journalistic profession in Serbia**

Since the democratic turn in 2000, research about the journalistic profession in Serbia has been relatively rare, while data about the media industry and professional community has been scarce and fragmentary. Therefore, our knowledge and understanding of the journalistic profession, culture and identity is still in its infancy. One of the most thorough studies of the professional community in Serbia, conducted in 2010/11, was aimed at mapping journalism transformation, considering the technological and economic challenges. However, this research highlighted the lack of available data about the professional community in Serbia, including the number of working journalists. Similarly, the number of media outlets was not reliable, media ownership, circulation and reach obscured, as well as overall national advertising and market data. Therefore, the survey done within this study provided the first comprehensive overview of the structure and status of the journalistic profession after the year 2000, showing that most journalists were highly educated, worked for broadcast media, and had stable employment contracts. However, journalists have ranked low wages as the biggest problem of the profession, closely after low quality of journalism and tabloidization, political pressure, and economic instability of the media companies. Conversely, they found common challenges brought by the advancement of new communication technologies that journalists in the western context faced as largely insignificant (Milivojević, 2012; Radojković, Milojević and Ugrinić, 2014).

Milojević and Krstić (2018) have analyzed qualitative interviews conducted with journalists and media owners within this research, along with interviews from two other studies, and summarized influences on transitional journalism within a hierarchy of influences model from 2003 to 2015. This analysis provided an

overview of the persistent patterns of corruptive behavior, enduring clientelism between politicians, owners of advertising agencies, business tycoons and the state, which keeps journalists and media system in a constant transitional position, with fluctuations in the slow process of democratization (Milojević and Krstić, 2018: 51). Jungblut and Hoxha (2017) research, based also on in-depth interviews with journalists, showed how such conditions lead to a wide spread of self-censorship. They have connected self-censorship to external political and economic pressure, and a lack of clear and applicable ethical guidelines. Their main conclusion that “journalists in the Western Balkans react to external pressure in such a way that they avoid open conflict with the political and economically powerful”, leading “to a state of co-existence where they exchange ‘favors’” (Jungblut and Hoxha, 2017: 235) is clearly in line with Milojević and Krstić (2018) findings.

Other studies based on document, regulatory and structural analysis are in line with these quantitative and qualitative research findings. Kisić (2015: 95) underlined that the media, after the change of regime in 2000, have “remained servile to governmental officials and political elites”. Kmezić (2018: 481) listed “lack of transparency in media funding and media ownership, strong economic dependence of media workers, lack of adequate protection for journalists, pressure from interconnected political and business groups” as causes of “creeping self-censorship” in the Serbian media. He argued that the absence of strong journalistic associations additionally aggravated their position. Similarly, Milutinović (2019: 1066) stressed that self-regulatory instruments have not stimulated the “emancipation of professional journalism against political pressures and financial blackmail in the process of the media system transition” and pointed out that the media have often served partial interests of their financiers rather than the public interest.

Overall, previous studies have portrayed a rather homogenous picture of the journalistic profession captured in transition, instrumentalized by political and economic elites, unable to self-organize and achieve professional autonomy. Starting from that picture, we aim to contribute to our knowledge about the professional identity of journalists by addressing the question of continuity and change. We examine journalists’ self-perception of changes in professional identity during their careers to provide novel insights into transformations of different professional identity elements during the democratic transition in Serbia. In this article, we analyze perceptions of the local journalists from Southeast Serbia. However, we argue that their perceptions are representative of the overall changes in professional identity, since local media and journalism are more sensitive to all challenges in the media sphere than national media (Vujović, Obradović, Pavlović, 2019; Prokopović, Jevtović, Jovanović, 2019; Vulić, Aleksić, Mitrović, 2019). Therefore, we believe that we can provide an even more nuanced portrayal of the identity changes by taking local scope, rather than national, for this study.

### **3. Methodology**

In order to answer the main research question, how the professional identity of journalists in southeastern Serbia has changed over time and what circumstances have influenced these changes, a thematic analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews

was conducted. Interviews were designed to gather journalists' perceptions of changes in the structural elements of a journalist's professional identity according to Deuze (2008): *professional elements on which a journalist's identity is based* (Q1); *social status or reputation of journalists in a society* (Q2); *protection of journalists, which is reflected through legislation, self-regulation and self-organization in the form of journalists' associations, collegiality* (Q3); *financial stability of journalists and the impact of economic uncertainty on the daily work of journalists* (Q4); *media market in terms of media pluralism, but also the position of the media in the market* (Q5). All the questions contained a comparative component. The journalists were asked to compare the mentioned professional elements *then* and *now* – and make a temporal reflection on the professional elements.

Time determinants used throughout the paper are *then* and *now*. The determinant *then* implies the beginnings of journalistic careers of the interviewed media professionals. In some cases, it was the beginning of the 2000s, in others, the mid-1980s. Either way, it refers to the period before socio-political changes in Serbia, or at least the beginning of the transitional period. In this research context, it is insignificant whether journalists refer to the period from 20 or 30 years ago, but it is necessary to point out the changes that the journalistic profession has gone through over decades of their work. The determinant *now*, apart from the current moment, covers almost the entire previous decade, because, as the interviewed journalists pointed out, it was a period of major structural economic and socio-political changes which brought some new challenges and uncertainties to the journalistic profession.

Interviews were conducted with ten journalists, representatives of different types of media (television, radio, press, online media and news agencies), with different editorial policies (public service, media recognized as pro-regime or pro-opposition) and with different employment contracts (full-time employees, freelancers and correspondents). Furthermore, selected study participants had to have over 15 years of experience in journalism and to be born before 1980 in order to be able to talk about the period of socio-political changes in Serbia. The length of the interviews ranged from 25 to 60 minutes, and the interviews were conducted in November and December 2021. In the presentation of research results, we refer to the interviewed journalists with code marks from J1 to J10.

## 4. Findings

### i. Professional elements on which a journalist's identity is based

Interviewed media professionals recognize work in the public interest and the intrigue and/or attractiveness of the journalistic work as crucial in deciding to start a professional journalistic career, and to remain working for decades. Speaking about the professional elements of journalists in the past, one of the interviewed journalists said: "Back then, a journalist was a very important factor in society and every journalist wanted to contribute to some truth and some investigation" (J3). Perceiving themselves as factors that can fundamentally change society, the

interviewed journalists at the beginning of their careers had idealistic ideas about journalism and their place in society: “My desire was to change the world around me. That was my first motive” (J4).

The work of a journalist, which requires constant presence, activity and daily challenges, certainly is highly specific and requires professionals who are naturally curious. The attractiveness of journalism in terms of working with people and developing curiosity is another element that was recognized as the first impulse for many interviewed journalists to become interested in the journalistic profession: “It was essentially a challenge for me to work with people, to have a job which doesn’t imply the same work every day. I graduated in law, but even then, I knew that wouldn’t be my profession. The job of a journalist was more intriguing and challenging for me” (J5). Similarly, J6 states: “Being at the most interesting events in the city becomes your habit over time.”

The desire to discover the truth, to change social circumstances and the tendency to criticize were the key elements upon which the interviewed media professionals built their professional identity at the beginning of their careers. One of the interviewed journalists said: “Maybe I was lucky to start working in one of the most democratic media outlets in our region at the time. It was TV5. There, we were taught to always have a critical opinion about anything, to always have two sides to every story. Nowadays, that is almost gone” (J8).

The interviewed media professionals agreed that the elements upon which journalists build their professional identity today differ from those which they identified themselves with as journalists decades ago. They emphasize the desire of journalists for self-promotion as the main difference, and commercial orientation at the expense of work in the public interest was also recognized as a significant element: “Nowadays, it is more important for journalists to be visible in a public space, as some kind of self-marketing; this can be achieved through some superficial sensationalist work” (J1). However, the interviewees agreed that there had always been journalists who were approaching this job for reasons other than pure love for a profession: “Then, as well as now, we had two groups of people – one group wanted to do this job as an everyday profession, and the other perceived journalism as a stepping stone for the public sector or for some PR position” (J4).

Some of the interviewed professionals characterized today’s work of journalists as propaganda, not seeing a way for journalists to do their job in the current socio-political circumstances in Serbia, without being the subject of instrumentalization: “Those who are starting a profession in journalism nowadays are faced with nothing else but propaganda [...] Especially if they report on political issues” (J3). However, journalists point out that in every period there are journalists who build their identity around true values and, valid professional elements: “My personal opinion is that young people choose journalism as their profession, because they think that by doing this job, they can change something they don’t like, that they will be able to influence changes in the society they live in” (J2). Similarly, J1 states: “There is a smaller number of those who are engaged in investigative journalism and recognizable in public as such, although I think that the first [personal promotion] is more dominant” (J1).

## ii. Social status or reputation of journalists in society

The struggle of journalists for the status of journalism as an autonomous profession, worthy of social respect, is a continuous process which began with the earliest development of journalism (Le Cam, Pereira, Ruellan, 2019). All interviewed journalists talked nostalgically about the earlier period, when journalists were honored and respected in society: “Journalism used to be a respected profession, and an extremely valued one; journalists were required to be educated, versatile, and on the other hand they were rewarded for their work. [...] More important than the financial side is that we, as journalists, were appreciated in the environments we lived in. People respected us, they cared about our opinion. They also cared about sharing their opinion with us. We were always welcome” (J2). Observed as educated, versatile and professional, a journalist was extremely respected and reputable (J2, J3, J4, J10) – *a journalist with a capital J* (N3). “Being a journalist was a privilege” (J9).

Although aware that journalists have never had a well-deserved status in society, interviewed media professionals agree that the status of journalists as a professional group in Serbia has lost importance over the years: “When I started doing this work [early 2000s], journalists were already subject to the instrumentalization of the government, but I think that nowadays that has reached its extremes. I think that, as in the whole society, there is a division between *ours* and *theirs*, that division is initiated by political power-holders [...] I think that journalists are less trusted than they were when I started doing this job, although it has never been at an enviable level, but now it’s irreversibly gone downhill” (J1). When it comes to the status of journalists in today’s Serbia, other interviewees also testified about the dizzying decline: “In 25 years, it all turned upside down. The attitude towards us, as journalists, has also changed. We no longer belong to the category of people who are engaged in a profession that is respected in society, we have been reduced to the level of a scorer who takes notes” (J2).

Loss of trust in journalists is one of the most common examples the interviewed journalists used to illustrate the unfavorable status of journalists in Serbia. Journalists listed various causes that led to this change in the perception of journalists in society, from the **systemic** ones: “political environment and transition” (J1); “media owners in alliance with politicians” (J2); “leading political structures” (J3); “employment through party ties” (J6); “tabloidization of media, lifestyle, and sensationalism in reporting” (J9); “struggle to maintain the status quo” (J8), to the **individual** ones, caused by systemic socio-political changes: “Journalists, that is, quasi-journalists have voluntarily agreed to be servants, that is the problem. We have voluntarily agreed to be manipulated” (J4); “There have been changes in our mindset, because no one is thinking about free journalism anymore. [...] When we write, we try not to do anything that could endanger our existence” (J2); “Journalists who were very cheap so they sold themselves; they started working for politics, politicians, for interest [...] they stopped being journalists, they became propagandists” (J3); “Material position and personal interest” (J4); “One gets the impression that anyone can be a journalist” (J5).

## iii. Protection of journalists (institutional and professional)

The position of journalists in society is greatly influenced by the institutional and professional protection they enjoy. Respect for journalists

and the journalistic profession as an important segment of society is reflected, among other things, in protection by the legislative framework and professional associations. In both senses, journalists in Serbia have never enjoyed a high level of protection. However, interviewed journalists believe that in recent years every type of protection has been at a very low level. “Associations provide legal support, but that is poor protection, because journalists, with or without the association’s lawyer, go through the same thing in court, since we know that lawsuits are mostly rejected in the pre-investigation phase. As far as legal protection is concerned, I don’t know if it is worse now or in the 1990s, but it seems to me that nothing has been significantly improved” (J1). J9 states: “In the last 10 years, there have been more and more attacks on journalists, intimidation, beatings, regardless of the law that should protect journalists. I think that there were fewer cases before, although the legal framework has never been aligned”. J4 has a similar opinion: “I think that journalists are not protected, neither then nor now. I think a journalist must have the status of an authorized person”.

Solidarity among journalists has been a frequent topic in Serbia in recent years<sup>6</sup>. Journalists are often harassed<sup>7</sup> even at live press conferences, and colleagues rarely stand up for each other: “We had situations in the field when all journalists should’ve left the event as an act of solidarity, but that almost never happens. “(J5). Interviewees recognized the unenviable existential position of journalists, who are under constant pressure from media owners and politicians in power, as the main reason for the lack of collegiality: [...] I think we are standing alone on some edge, I don’t know which one, but we are lonely there” (J2). J4 also testified about the pressures: “We will sympathize with the journalists who experienced harassment and humiliation. But what kind of protection is that? If you raise your voice, you will be fired the next day. The message is: *Be Quiet!*”.

“Even today, regardless of working for different media where owners are often in some kind of conflict, a colleague will not leave one colleague stranded [...] because we are the ones in the field, we are in this together, we have the same job” (J2). This kind of response was common, which indicates that “journalists identify themselves more easily with the profession of journalism than, for example, with the medium or media company that employs them” (Deuze, 2005: 446). Support remains in the field, while few journalists speak up publicly: “When it comes to the persecution of journalists, colleagues do not stand publicly for their colleagues, as they have not stood before” (J5). Most of the interviewed media professionals highlight that solidarity is higher at the local level in comparison with solidarity among journalists working in national media. They explained it by the smaller

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see article: <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/gde-je-nestala-novinarska-solidarnost-u-srbiji/> accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

<sup>7</sup> For example, see: Article 1: <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/a115681-gasic-volim-novinarke-koje-ovakolako-kleknul/> Article 2: <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/a671009-zaklina-tatalovic-kako-je-vucic-poceo-dase-ljuti-na-mene/> Article 3: <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/premierjerka-optuzila-n1-da-fabrikuje-afere-ivodi-kampanju-protiv-trece-doze/> accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022



number of journalists at the local level and the fact that everyone knows each other personally.

#### **iv. Financial stability of journalists and the impact of economic uncertainty on the daily work of journalists**

The financial stability of journalists is an indicator that reflects the position and respect for the journalistic profession in society, as well as the personal position of journalists and their attitude towards work. The job of a journalist has never been overpaid, especially when it comes to local media. For example, journalists in the local media in Niš have an average salary in the amount of the national minimum, around 30,000 dinars (Vujović, Obradović, Pavlović, 2019: 43-44). Most of the interviewed journalists, who work in the local media, stated that they work for a national minimum salary, although that question was not directly asked: “Employers are guided by the fact that journalism is a job you do because you love it, and that you will do it even if they don’t pay you enough. Now you are even more limited, you are not allowed to write everything, there is no freedom, and, above all of that, you are not even paid for your work” (J8).

All journalists agreed that the financial situation was better before, although they also stated that the work of journalists was never adequately paid: “As political stability changed, fees were dropping more and more, there was no increase, the minimum salary is standard for most newsrooms south of Belgrade” (J9). However, stability in terms of regular payments and carelessness in terms of a safer job position are reasons journalists especially emphasize (J2, J3, J4, J6, J7, J10). According to the journalists, the challenges brought by the transition in the context of media restructuring – *media ownership, media deregulation, financing models*, etc. – have led to financial insecurity, lower salaries, constant fear of losing jobs, worse employment contracts and, paradoxically, greater media dependence.

#### **v. Media market**

The issue of the media market is related to the previous one about financial stability, as one inevitably affects the other. The media market in Serbia became chaotic after the 2000s (Tomić, 2016). On the one hand, the establishment of many new media, the privatization of the existing media, and on the other hand, the closure of many media during or shortly after the process of privatization, created an atmosphere of uncertainty and put journalists in an unenviable position. Until recently, media that had a secure income (for example, local city media) found themselves after privatization in a harsh market and many of them did not survive it. According to the interviewed journalists, the possibility of establishing new media (almost uncontrolled) did not bring pluralism and quality in the media landscape (J1 - J10). Economic uncertainty has become even more pronounced. However, local media journalists do not link this uncertainty to a lack of advertisers and a weak market, but directly to political pressures and the influence of the ruling parties on their work, as well as to the new models of media financing. In that context, J8 explains: “You have to be politically eligible to get advertising and/or to have connection with someone from the ruling party to help you with that [...] it was not like that before, back then you had a television’s name and a rating that was not obtained



because you are close to the authorities, but because you have a realistic rating and a good-quality program”.

Another possibility when it comes to media financing is co-financing projects<sup>8</sup>, which is also one of the challenges that all journalists mentioned as one of the most harmful to media freedom: “Almost everyone is financed by projects and the state practically keeps the media on an even shorter leash than before and they are still in a precarious position” (J1). Local media are economically reduced to complete dependence on project co-financing: “Project financing means you’re doing projects; the project is approved by someone and you are limited in your work. The one who approved the project pays you and therefore you have to meet his expectations and obey all their demands; that also kills journalism. If the project doesn’t work out, you run out of money” (J2). Journalists oppose this type of media financing and believe that it is just another way of controlling the media by the authorities: “I am a big opponent of project financing, because when it was designed it was thought that journalists would be more independent, but it turned out that it works on the principle ‘I’ll give something to you, if you give something back to me’. They give each other funds so that most of the money goes to several media outlets. Moreover, if you are funded by the city, you are again dependent and not independent” (J3). This type of media financing has shown a great blackmailing potential of political officials, especially at the local level, although these pressures cannot be proved, because the projects of certain media can be rejected by the committee for various reasons, seemingly justified: “Media funding, project-based, has put the media in a position to think about whether or not to criticize – for example, if they criticize a lot this year, they may not get the money next year. The fact is that the media in Serbia cannot survive in these conditions. Although it is taxpayers’ money [project co-funding], it is not recognized as that in public” (J4). According to journalists, local media in Serbia have been brought to the brink of extinction. They cannot survive if they are not pro-regime oriented: “How not to rely on project financing and to be financed totally commercially if you are a small local media? What if you are not politically eligible?” (J8).

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on this type of financing, see: Tomić, B. G. (2016). Projektno sufinansiranje medija u deregulacionom ključu. *Srpska politička misao*. (3), 43-58. <https://ips.ac.rs/publications/projektno-sufinansiranje-medija-u-deregulacionom-kljucu/>

**Table 1** Outline of the main research findings – excerpts from the interviews with journalists

	Research question	Key lines (excerpts) from the interviews with journalist
Then and now	(Q1): Professional elements on which a journalist's identity is based	<p><b>Then:</b> "Analytics and research work"; "Critical attitude towards all social events"; "The desire to change the world around me"; "The desire to erase differences and boundaries between people."</p> <p><b>Now:</b> "There are few who [today] are engaged in real, investigative journalism"; "Self-marketing"; "Desire for public work"; "A turning point towards a higher goal"; "Profit orientation".</p>
	(Q2): Social status or reputation of journalists in society	<p><b>Then:</b> "Journalism used to be a highly valued profession"; "People just respected us, they cared about our opinion"; "The journalist was welcome everywhere, now they are playing with journalists, insulting journalists"; "We have been reduced to a level of scorer"; "We have voluntarily agreed to be manipulated"; "I am sometimes ashamed to say that I am a journalist".</p> <p><b>Now (causes):</b> "A transition that takes too long"; "Media financing"; "Political environment"; "Media owners in alliance with politicians"; "Journalists who were very cheap, so they sold themselves"; "Political and material interests"; "Employment through party connections"; "The struggle to maintain the status quo."</p>
	(Q3): Protection of journalists (institutional and professional)	<p><b>Then:</b> "We used to show more solidarity"; "Journalists are not protected, neither then or now";</p> <p><b>Now:</b> "Today, lawsuits are mostly rejected in the pre-investigation phase"; "Colleagues do not stand publicly up for their colleagues, as they have not stood before"; "If you are defending someone now, you are exposing yourself to the danger of being exposed to the same persecution." "If you raise your voice, the next day you can get fired, the message is: <i>Be quiet!</i>"; "Professional associations are also divided, because they follow divisions in society"; "A journalist must have the status of an authorized person."</p>
	(Q4): Financial stability of journalists and the impact of economic uncertainty on the daily work of journalists	<p><b>Then:</b> "The financial situation has never actually been good"; "We may not have been in a much better financial position before, but we were much more carefree";</p> <p><b>Now:</b> "Being a journalist today means that you are literally brought to the edge of existence"; "They caused us the greatest damage through project financing"; "Objectively speaking, we are materially on the lowest social level." "The situation journalists are in is catastrophic"; "Most journalists work part-time for several media outlets"; "Now you are limited, you are not allowed to write everything, there is no freedom, and above all of that you are not paid for your work";</p>
	(Q5): Media market	<p><b>Then:</b> "Earlier, the rating of television was not obtained because you are close to the government, but because you have a realistic rating and a quality program." "The quality of today's media is much, much worse than when we had only one state media, although criticized for being dependent, the quality of our program was exceptional";</p> <p><b>Now:</b> "More media outlets haven't brought greater pluralism"; "The new media market has not brought us quality"; "It seems that the media image of Serbia has never been worse"; "The fact is that the media in Serbia cannot survive"; "There are many media outlets that do not deserve to be called media"; "You have to be politically eligible to get advertisers or project financing";</p>

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Changes in the field of technological progress, digitalization and the transition to the online sphere, certainly pose challenges to local media and affect the professional identity of journalists. However, in a post-transition country and a hybrid regime<sup>9</sup> such as Serbia, the biggest challenges are economic status and political influence. The status and identity of journalists is influenced, above all, by the uncertain economic position of both the media and journalists and the instrumentalization of the media and journalists by the authorities. The overall socio-political environment has led to journalists no longer being thought of as educated, versatile professionals working in the public interest (and as interviewed journalists testify, this was the case at the beginning of their careers), but as propagandists. One of the journalists (J5) stated: “Sometimes I am ashamed to say that I am a journalist, and that was not the case before”. This sentence summarizes the self-perception of most of the interviewed journalists. Whether they find the reasons for the erosion of the profession in systemic changes or in the individual guilt of journalists who did not resist the pressure, most journalists admit that they work under pressure and that they often agree to that pressure. Self-censorship stands out as the most common element in conversations with journalists, although none of them confessed it directly. However, through the statements “if we criticize, we lose our jobs” or “we cannot rebel because we have been brought to the edge of existence”, it is clear that journalists in the local media in Niš are in an unenviable position.

During the in-depth interviews, we noticed that journalists inserted politics in every answer, even when the question had no direct connection with political influence. Therefore, we can conclude that political pressure is still the most aggravating force shaping journalism in transitional contexts. Journalists in the local media are exposed to daily political pressure, open or covert, intertwined with economic dependence on city authorities. The statements of one of the participants (J2) that journalists are reduced to the level of scorer, or J3 stating that today’s journalists are propagandists, show the way journalists perceive themselves and their colleagues.

There is an important difference between journalists who work for only one local media and those who work as correspondents for national media, public services or news agencies. The former are exposed to direct pressure, but they speak about it quite openly and critically, aware of their position and the position of their colleagues. Others are less burdened by political influence and economic difficulties when it comes to self-perception, but when it comes to the perception of journalism in Serbia as a whole, they also recognize political pressure as the main issue.

In conversations, local media journalists often compare their position with colleagues who work for national media outlets, stating that they are not in the same financial position, and that journalists in larger media have “decent” employment

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<sup>9</sup> See Freedom House Report, 2021: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2021>, accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

contracts and “decent” salaries. They also stated that only journalists working for large private media that are not pro-regime oriented are not subject to instrumentalization by the authorities and are in a good financial position. Moreover, “Journalists working for foreign-owned media are in a better position than others” (J2). With this statement, this journalist pointed out the distrust in the media owners originating from Serbia, because, as she believes, all of them are inevitably in contact with politicians in power, and their motive for purchasing media outlets was inherently political.

Overall, our results correspond highly to previous research, indicating almost no changes in professional identity in the last couple of years. While their western counterparts struggle with challenges brought by the digital revolution, journalists in Serbia are still struggling with political and economic issues of transition to democracy and are nostalgic about the period before the nineties. Comparing the periods defined as *then* and *now*, all journalists agree that the journalistic profession has lost its former status and that their position in each segment is worse or the same as in the 90s (period of crisis and war). In such socio-political circumstances, journalists lose their professional identity, accept pressure and, as we can see, are very aware of that. However, most of them do not see a way to change things, while they nostalgically remember the past and their former status.

In future studies, it would be interesting to compare the responses of journalists in local media with the responses of journalists working for the major national media and find out if they differ, given that local journalists have often made that comparison themselves in interviews.

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## PROFESIONALNI IDENTITET NOVINARA NEKAD I SAD: PERSPEKTIVA NOVINARA SA JUGOISTOKA SRBIJE

**Apstrakt** *Profesija novinarstva suočava se sa mnogobrojnim izazovima poslednjih decenija. Pritisak tržišta, pojava nemedijskih aktera koji proizvode sadržaj, smanjenje publike koja je zainteresovana za vesti, samo su neki od izazova sa kojima se medijski profesionalci u doba kulture konvergencije svakodnevno suočavaju (Deuze, 2008; Donsbach, 2009; Jenkins, 2008). Ukoliko sve navedeno posmatramo u kontekstu zemalja koje nemaju dugu demokratsku tradiciju, izazovi postaju još izraženiji, što može rezultirati opadanjem ugleda profesije, pa i gubitkom, ili krizom, profesionalnog identiteta (Donsbach, 2009).*

*Polazeći od strukturnih elemenata profesionalnog identiteta novinara (Deuze, 2008), sprovedeni su dubinski polustrukturisani intervjui sa deset novinara zaposlenih u različitim tipovima medija u Nišu. Kako bi bili u poziciji da uporede svoj položaj u periodu pre i posle društveno-političke i tehnološke tranzicije, za koju u ovom radu uzimamo 2000 godinu, svi novinari su rođeni pre 1980. godine, i imaju minimum 15 godina iskustva u bavljenju novinarstvom.*

*Tematska analiza intervjua pokazuje da je prema mišljenju novinara status novinarstva kao profesije u konstantnom opadanju; da krizi identiteta novinara doprinose komercijalizacija, konvergencija i pritisak tržišta, ali da su društveno-političke okolnosti te koje imaju najveći uticaj na (samo)percepciju novinarstva kao profesije.*

**Ključne reči:** *identitet novinara, status novinara, perspektiva novinara, jugoistok Srbije, dubinski intervjui*





## LINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC MEANS IN THE FUNCTION OF (NON)COMMUNICATION IN THE NOVELS OF ERNESTO SABATO<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The subject of the paper is the research of linguistic and stylistic aspects of prose texts of the Argentinian novelist Ernesto Sabato, with the aim of presenting the impossibility of communication between the heroes of the novels: “El Túnel” (“The Tunnel”), “Sobre héroes y tumbas” (“On Heroes and Tombs”) and “Abaddón, el Exterminador” (“The Angel of Darkness”). This paper will consider (non) communication as a result of loneliness, mistrust and lack of understanding of the heroes of Sabato’s novels; it will provide an overview of the discourse features, i.e., speech used by Sabato’s heroes and their stylistic choices, in order to point out the frequency of certain lexical and syntactic forms in their speech, as well as the meaning hereof in the text. The aim of this paper is to examine the manners in which the text comprehension is slowed down by exploring the discourse of the heroes of Sabato’s novels, whereas the process of text comprehension also includes experiencing the (un) spoken in narrative communication, as well as the aspect of redundancy in linguistic expression. In addition, the paper reveals the presence of certain figures of syntax in Sabato’s novels as an additional tool in the research of (non)communication at the syntactic level, whereas collecting indicators of the character of Sabato’s heroes in the text, have led to the conclusions on individual and stereotypical character-traits.*

**Key words:** *Ernesto Sabato, (non)communication, the (un)spoken, linguistic and stylistic aspects, redundancy, figures of syntax*

### 1. Introduction

Ernesto Sabato (1911-2011), an Argentinian novelist and essayist, is one of the most eminent figures in the contemporary culture of Hispanic America. With J. L. Borges and J. Cortázar, Sabato is one of the three most important modern Argentinian writers. The first novel, *El Túnel* (*The Tunnel*, 1948), is a trilogy written with two other famous Sabato’s novels: *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*, 1961) and *Abaddón, el Exterminador* (*The Angel of Darkness*, 1974). The novel *El Túnel* (*The Tunnel*) is a drama about the impossibility of communication, since the main character is an introverted painter who despises everything around him. The main theme of the novel is human existence and the search for personal identity, which result in the alienation of the hero Castel due to his inability to communicate and, finally, culminates in a crime of love. In the second novel, *Sobre héroes y tumbas*

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(*On Heroes and Tombs*), Sabato indicates that hope does exist showing that the hero Martin found the meaning of life in Alejandra, although the continuous lack of communication leads him to the brink of suicide. However, contrary to the novel *El Túnel (The Tunnel)*, this novel does not end in tragedy, but represents the expression of metaphysical hope. In order to understand the last Sabato's novel, *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*, it is necessary to read the previous two, because most of the characters from the first two novels reappear in the third one. The central hero is the novelist himself, Sabato. The novel is demanding in terms of summarizing, because it consists of a large number of short chapters in which the narrators take turns. The novel is the culmination of Sabato's literary expression – it is written in the form of meditative discussions with a large number of episodes and it is not simple to single out the main characters. This novel differs from the previous ones in a way that it mostly expresses the thoughts and attitudes of the novelist Sabato through the hero Sabato.

The research of the problem of (non)communication among the heroes in Sabato's prose will present non-existence of communication, the manners in which the motives of (non)communication and loneliness are expressed in Sabato's prose. In addition, it will display the stylistic means by which Sabato depicts the impossibility of communication among his heroes in the novels. After the introductory part, (non)communication will be considered in the following four sections: *Speech characterization of heroes in the novels of E. Sabato*, *The (un)spoken in narrative communication in the novels of E. Sabato*, *Redundancy in the novels of E. Sabato* and *Figures of syntax in the novels of E. Sabato*. These four sections will provide an interpretative insight into the narrative of Sabato's novels, with the aim of conducting further research into the non-existence of communication between the heroes and indicating its direct connection with the loneliness of the heroes. The tendency to establish communication is related to the process of releasing the hero, since only after liberation the purpose of existence can be found.

## **2. Speech characterization of the heroes in the novels of E. Sabato**

A novelist who decides to let us know the thoughts of a character is actually inviting us to see things from that character's point of view (Leech and Short, 2007: 271). The aspirations of the novelists in the nineteenth and twentieth century (Dostoevsky, Kafka, Sartre, Camus), who tended to present the inner drama that took place in the consciousness of the heroes, through dealing with the concept of self-knowledge as well as the concepts of loneliness and alienation from the central anti-hero, caused that certain novelists redirect their narrative focus from the story to the consciousness of the hero, which is also visible in the case of Sabato's novel *El Túnel (The Tunnel)*. It is not always easy to single out many variations within the point of view achieved through the manipulation of the author's voice in relation to the voices of the participants in the fiction. These interactions between speech and thought presentation and a point of view have become one of the most considered

areas of interpretative significance in the novel and, therefore, represent a very productive aspect of the study of style in fiction (Leech and Short, 2007: 281).

For Rimon-Kenan (2007: 77), a construct of character within the story presents a network of character-traits – namely, the character is constructed by assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum, which contribute to the conclusion about the character’s traits. The indicators in the text can be presented through direct definition and indirect presentation. A direct definition can be identified when the traits of a character are described by an adjective, nouns or a clause. In *El Túnel (The Tunnel)*, Castel, as a narrator, directly defines himself as follows:

“Mi cabeza es un laberinto oscuro.” (Sábato, 2008: 24).

However, the novel leaves no space for shaping the image of Maria on the basis of direct definition. Contrary to the above, one can get acquainted with her traits through the action and presentation of her surroundings. Through Maria’s conversation with Castel one learns much more about Castel, whereas to a lesser extent Maria narrates about her marriage, family, and herself in general:

“Era un hombre incapaz de crear nada, era destructivo, tenía una inteligencia mortal, era un nihilista. Algo así como tu parte negativa.” (Sábato, 2008: 51).

The character-traits can be displayed indirectly – through the actions of the characters (one-time action or habitual ones), characters’ speech (through conversation or as a silent activity of the mind), external appearance and surroundings. The actions of the characters can be classified into the acts of commissions (an act performed by the character), the acts of omissions (something that the character should do, but fails to do so) and the acts of contemplation (unrealized plan or intention of the character) (Rimon-Kenan, 2007: 80). The impossibility for Martin to express himself in front of Alejandra (the act of omission) and the obsession of the narrator-hero Sabato to point out to implicit readers that attention should be redirected from their inner world to the actual state in the society (character’s intention) become central motives in the novels *Sobre héroes y tumbas (On Heroes and Tombs)* and *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*. The images of the characters of Martin and Alejandra are shaped by Bruno’s observations, whose presence in the novel is barely conceivable. Alejandra’s behavior on the scene:

“No te entiendo... — balbuceó Martín. — Nunca te he entendido...

No te preocupes. Yo tampoco me entiendo. Ni sé por qué te hago todo esto. No sé por qué te hago sufrir así.” (Sábato, 2007: 187)

simultaneously symbolizes her need to create intimacy with Martin and her mental instability; instability of Alejandra’s personality and unpredictability of her actions are visible in her speech, within which her inability to understand her own behavior has been expressed and, finally, her inability to find the reason for continuously causing pain to Martin. The individual character-traits of Castel, Martin and one of numerous heroes in *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* (Jorge

Ledesma) become stereotypical (reclusiveness, loneliness, inability to communicate) and are suggested in the following:

“Existió una persona que podría entenderme. *Pero fue, precisamente, la persona que maté*”. (Sábato, 2008: 7);

“Y también, como en muchas otras ocasiones posteriores, su silencio y su incapacidad para el diálogo eran compensados por Alejandra, que siempre, o casi siempre, adivinaba sus pensamientos”. (Sábato, 2007: 30);

“Aquella sensación me sigue, este viento helado que a veces me duerme un costado de la cara: la soledad infinita”. (Sábato, 1981: 169).

In Sabato's novels, underlining through analogy, as one of the ways of indirect presentation of characters, occurs when characters are destructive. Jealousy, possessiveness, and emotional manipulation, as patterns of behavior, culminate in inappropriate behavior. Castel kills Maria, although he considers her to be the only person who can understand him. Martin needs Alejandra and considers her a being of distinctive qualities, an unhappy and lonely being as he is. However, for him she still remains distant and unattainable. When comparing the characters of Castel and Martin, it can be concluded that Martin's character is as agonizing as Castel's; however, contrary to Martin, he is self-destructive. Castel *knows* that he needs Maria, but he *does not know* what he needs Maria for; he *knows* that Maria thinks like him, but he *does not know* what Maria thinks, and finally he *knows* that Maria feels what he feels, but he *does not know* what he himself feels. Martin speaks more often about his need for Alejandra, to whom he constantly returns, despite her numerous attempts to end the relationship with him. Martin's character is actually modelled on Castel, in the sense that he is also truly afraid of loneliness, and therefore obsessed with the fact that Alejandra will abandon him and each time they meet, he asks her to prove to him how much she loves him. That is why he becomes pathologically jealous whenever he sees her with another man. Nevertheless, at no point does Martin, contrary to Castel, think of ending Alejandra's life unless she completely surrenders to him. Martin makes conclusions on the things that Alejandra did not say, that is, on the things she implies – through the entire novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*), Martin strives to reconstruct what Alejandra intended to say through her answers: how he could help her, why she needs him, whether she loves him, what Alejandra dreams of and what she thinks of. Alejandra's discourse is, indeed, the discourse of an anxious, dramatic and tragic individual; she is the protagonist of an obscure and inaccessible world unknown to Martin, whose mystery makes him shiver. In *Abaddón, el Exterminador* (*The Angel of Darkness*) the hero Sabato was not satisfied with the mere human mind exploring through dialogue with numerous heroes, but on the contrary, he took a step further – he demonstrated that the loneliness, not only his own, but also of other heroes, is more intense than loneliness of pairs of heroes in previous novels. The fragmentary narrative structure presents a mosaic of autobiographical events and fantastic elements, accompanied by parallel stories, literary theories and philosophical discussions. The novel focuses

on the hero Sabato who judges the world around him and tries to find his place in such a world.

### 3. The (un)spoken in narrative communication in the novels of E. Sabato

Rimon-Kenan (2007: 157) indicates two ways of slowing down text comprehension and creating tension in readers: delays and gaps. Delays occur when the imparting of information in the text is left for a later stage. This type of narrative procedure can create two types of tension: the one oriented towards the past and the other oriented towards the future of the story. The state of tension is described as a feeling, arising from apprehension and uncertainty related to the progress or the outcome of the action. Tension depends on hints and occurs when an outcome is possible, but it is not clear whether it will be achieved, or when it is suspected that a certain outcome will occur, but it is unclear when and how it will happen (Prince, 2011: 113). Although at the beginning of the story in *El Túnel (The Tunnel)*, Castel explicitly says that he killed Maria, i.e., the reader is aware of the outcome of the event, tension arises on the one hand, in order to find out the circumstances that were driving him to write about his crime, whereas on the other hand, the reader wants to know the details of the relationship between them and how the idea of the crime occurred to him. In order to maintain interest, the reader of *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* keeps tension in terms of presentation of information about the act of murder until the final pages when the whole process of reading the novel is sublimated in the last effect contained in Castel's sentence:

“Tengo que matarte, María. Me has dejado solo.” (Sabato, 2008: 94).

The intertwining of tension with surprise is a significant feature of a gripping plot; surprise occurs when expectations regarding future events are disrupted by the things that actually happen (Prince, 2011: 80). In the following excerpt from the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas (On Heroes and Tombs)*:

“Explicarme a mí cómo es Alejandra, se dijo Bruno, cómo es su cara, cómo son los pliegues de su boca.” Y pensó que eran precisamente aquellos pliegues desdeñosos y cierto tenebroso brillo de sus ojos lo que sobre todo distinguía el rostro de Alejandra del rostro de Georgina, a quien de verdad él había amado. Porque ahora lo comprendía, había sido a ella a quien verdaderamente quiso, pues cuando creyó enamorarse de Alejandra era a la madre de Alejandra a quien buscaba, como esos monjes medievales que intentaban descifrar el texto primitivo debajo de las restauraciones, debajo de las palabras borradas y sustituidas. Y esa insensatez había sido la causa de tristes desencuentros con Alejandra...” (Sabato, 2007: 10),

the reader is suddenly told that Bruno also had certain emotional affection, not only for Alejandra's mother, but also for Alejandra herself. By inserting Bruno's

thoughts into Martin's retrospective presentation on the encounter with Alejandra, there has been achieved the delay oriented towards the past. By this procedure, in the interaction between the text and the reader, a simultaneous effect of surprise and tension has been achieved – the effect of surprise by putting in the centre Martin's narration to Bruno about (non)communication with Alejandra, whereas Bruno is presented in the novel as a listener of the contemplative character. Tension arises when the reader finds that Bruno is also a personification of another irrational character in Sabato's series hereof. This irrationality (*la insensatez*) has been the cause of misunderstanding. However, in the end, the reader remains uninformed about the details of the relationship between Bruno and Alejandra, that is, the reader does not find out whether feelings were mutual and what the reasons were for Martin's silence about that fact. In this way, the time of the story continues to flow, however, the reader's understanding of the narrated events is hindered by the created gap, that is, by omitting information about the past and the present (Rimon-Kenan, 2007: 158). In *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*, the reader is presented with a manipulated picture of reality, given that one of the protagonists in the novel is named in two ways, in one place as Sabato, and in another as S. It has not been clarified whether numerous conversations, confessions and dreams in the novel refer to the same character. In addition, there were alternate episodes with the incestuous relationship between young man Nacho (a projection of rebellious and violent Martin) and Agustina (reincarnation of the late Alejandra), and who, eventually represent the followers of the primordial and (non)communicative characters – Castel and Maria. It seems that Sabato's characters in the novels are timeless, that they continue to live and act outside of fiction – as if Sabato does not control the lives of his heroes, but they exist independently. Numerous details from Sabato's biography, as the author of the novel, are given in the novel *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*, and when at the beginning of the novel the reader is faced with the fact that one of the heroes has the same name as the real author of the novel, tension arises for the purpose of solving the riddle concerning the extent to which it is possible to identify the hero Sabato with Sabato as the author of the novel. Due to the large number of unrelated episodes, chapters and characters in the novel, i.e., abandoning the concept of a traditional novel, the narrative has no chronological sequence – therefore, it can be said that owing to Sabato's new attitude towards the text, surprise is constantly present in the process of reading *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*. This paper supports the opinion of Rimon-Kenan (2007: 152) stating that some texts were designed with the intention of preventing the formation of any “final hypothesis” or comprehensive meaning; this is achieved by making various items cancel each other out, without providing clearly opposed possibilities. The end of *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* does not happen without a final hypothesis. Moreover, the reader certainly forms several hypotheses – each of these is undoubtedly based on the concept of fighting the forces of the irrational.

The procedure of “temporarily being silent in terms of providing information hereof”, i.e. the procedure of delaying, was fully applied in *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* due to Sabato's primary goal – it is of negligible importance to present information on



whether and in what way Castel killed Maria and, therefore, such a scene can be left for the end of the novel. The sequence of events which have led to that act is of much greater importance, that is, the intimate confession of Castel's eternal loneliness. Tension ends the moment one witnesses the fulfillment of Castel's intention – if Maria cannot be exclusively his, she has no right to live. The novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*) without delay presents the information that Alejandra was killed in a fire, therefore, we know that both Martin and Alejandra's agonizing relationship will come to an end at some point – the goal is to find out how Alejandra contributed to the Martin's process of becoming mature. Bruno's relationship with Alejandra remains marked by a gap in the novel, without a possibility to reconstruct the events. Finally, *Abaddón, el Exterminador* (*The Angel of Darkness*) presents a riddle without a final solution – it proves the thesis that comprehensive reading does not lead to the integrated meaning and to the clarification of the text as a whole.

The gap can be temporary (filled-in at some point in the text) or permanent (remained open even after the text has come to an end), and the distinction between them can be made only retrospectively (Rimon-Kenan, 2007: 161). Temporary gaps exist only at the text level, while the permanent ones exist both at the text level and at the story level. The discrepancies between story-time and text-time are denoted by the terms *prolepsis* and *analepsis*. In the case of *prolepsis*, the events that will follow after the present moment are hinted at, while in the case of *analepsis*, we return to the events that preceded the present moment. In the first case, the gap appears by leaving out the events between the present narrative and the predicted future, whereas in the second, the gap appears by looking at the already narrated events from a new point of view. In the paragraph from the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*):

“Pero si no es así”, le diría dos años después la muchacha que en ese momento estaba a sus espaldas; un tiempo enorme — pensaba Bruno —, porque no se medía por meses y ni siquiera por años, sino, como es propio de esa clase de seres, por catástrofes espirituales y por días de absoluta soledad y de inenarrable tristeza; (Sábato, 2007: 7),

the comment on the conversation between Martin and Alejandra, which will follow two years later, results in a shift from Martin's story to Alejandra's, constituting a heterodiegetic *prolepsis* in relation to Bruno's narration of the events between Martin and Alejandra. This leap into the future of the story actually presents a temporary gap, which aims to increase the interest and curiosity of the reader. Primary narration in the following episode from *Abaddón, el Exterminador* (*The Angel of Darkness*):

“Subieron al puente y se acodaron sobre la baranda, en la mitad del río, mirando hacia la desembocadura; como antes, como en tiempos infinitamente más felices, tiempos que en ese instante (pensaba Bruno) a Martín le parecerían pertenecer a alguna vida anterior, a una lejana encarnación de la que uno se recuerda ambigualmente, como de los sueños (...) Entre aquella Alejandra y la que un par de años antes había encontrado



en un parque de Buenos Aires se abría un abismo de siglos tenebrosos.“ (Sábato, 1981: 207-208)

would be the events between Martin and Alejandra in the present moment, whereas the story of former Alejandra has been subordinated to the mentioned course of action. Analepsis provides information about the character of Alejandra from the past and evokes the past filtered in the memory of the narrator Bruno. Creating the place for analepsis confirms the fact that for a complete understanding of individual characters from *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*, it is necessary to read the previous novel; by Alejandra's revival in *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* after her death in the previous novel, Sabato's obsession with the idea of the immortality of the soul has been pointed out to the reader, in the form of vague memories or dreams. Martin's love, desperation and loneliness do not fade away even fifteen years later, on the contrary, Alejandra continues to exist in Martin's spirit. Structuring the parts of the text in the novel *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* is further complicated by the fact that there are a large number of permanent gaps within the text, although they do not prevent the reader from being continuously surprised by the appearance of numerous characters from all spheres of Argentinian life. Sabato sees them as people helplessly lost in chaos and darkness, whereas every conversation with them is considered as one of the journeys through nothingness. In *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* the reader constantly makes an effort to understand Sabato's concept of events and the relationships among numerous heroes. It is complicated to single out the central characters, however, it is much easier to single out, as the cornerstone of every event, Sabato's character, who unobtrusively expresses his opinion about art. Therefore, the reader gets the impression that at certain moments he encounters another of Sabato's autobiographical essays. There are no detailed descriptions as in previous novels, but the general impression is that it is a performance of a play in which the actors take turns. All the characters in *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* are mostly Sabato's interlocutors, and in the novel they are not given enough space so that one can learn more about their destinies.

#### 4. Redundancy in the novels of E. Sabato

Contrary to the concepts of delays and gaps in the text, this paper will also consider the concept of redundancy. The basic settings of the concept of redundancy can be found within language, whereas its characteristic features are shown in terms of grammar, syntax and other aspects of language. The main disadvantage of the discussion on redundancy is the lack of a precise definition and an answer to the question of what redundancy is. A wide range of definitions is present in the literature – some of these rely on psycholinguistics, whereas some exclusively rely on linguistics. Starting from the aspect of information in communication, most definitions of linguistic redundancy in the literature are based on the explanation that the essential basis of redundancy

is the repetition of information. A number of definitions of this term are focused on the purpose of redundancy, which means that redundancy herein is directly related to ensuring the comprehensibility of the message in the communication process. In the paper entitled *What is Linguistic Redundancy?* the researchers Wit and Gillette (Ernst-Jan C. Wit, Marie Gillette) distinguish grammatical redundancy, which is systematic and obligatory and forms an integral part of the language system (it is derived from the grammatical language rules) and contextual redundancy, which is used to achieve a certain rhetorical effect (Wit and Gillette, 1999: 1-17). Leech and Short also spoke about the degree of redundancy (2007: 207), marking it as the result of the relative uncertainty of the situational context of the literary message. The purpose of linguistic redundancy does not merely refer to the enhancement of comprehensibility, i.e., to comprehensive understanding of what has been said. Moreover, it expands to the aspect of emphasizing and intensifying, contrasting elements, creating a “poetic” effect, avoidance of ambiguity and indicating features of individual elements, i.e., usage of words and expressions that explain, single out, compare and emphasize what has already been contained in the message. Unlike contextual redundancy and due to its obligatory nature, the grammatical redundancy can serve only for the purpose of the first category of comprehensive understanding of statements, but not for the other five “intentional” functions. Thus, contextual redundancy is the repetition of information that is, in grammatical terms, nonobligatory. However, within contextual redundancy the following categories are distinguished (Wit and Gillette, 1999: 9-12):

- *identical or synonymous repetition*, which occurs when the expression contains two or more identical or synonymous words, and this type of redundancy has a semantic goal:
  - „— Esa escena de la playa me da miedo — agregué después de un largo rato —, aunque sé que es algo más profundo. No, más bien quiero decir que me representa más profundamente a mí... Eso es. No es un mensaje claro, todavía, no, pero me representa profundamente a mí.” (Sábato, 2008: 27);
- *isolated (salient) repetition* - is constituted when one group of words implicitly repeats what the other group of words explicitly expresses:
  - “En el momento en que se separaban, después de haber caminado unos pasos, recordó o advirtió que no habían combinado nada para encontrarse. Y volviéndose, corrió hacia Alejandra para decírselo”. (Sábato, 2007: 16);
  - “No habría dado ninguna importancia a esa pregunta si después de tantos años de no verlo, más o menos en el año 1962, imagínese, no se me hubiera cruzado de nuevo en el camino. Cruzado... Este lenguaje distraído que esamos en la vida corriente, usted sabe. Porque no creo que se cruzase en el sentido causal que se le da de ordinario a esa expresión. Ese individuo me buscaba. Comprende? Más, todavía: me seguía desde lejos, quién sabe cuánto tiempo. Cómo sé que me seguía? Es cosa de olfato, es un instinto que no me engaña jamás. Y me seguía desde que leyó mi primera novela, probablemente. Y sin probablemente”. (Sábato, 1981: 65);
- *contrasting repetition* - when two or more words, which semantically constitute a contrast, are repeated or in some other ways are redundantly coded:

„Mi corazón golpeó. Necesitaba detalles: me emocionan los detalles, no las generalidades”. (Sábato, 2008: 29);

“Son seres que no escriben con facilidad sino con desgarramiento. Hombres que un poco sueñan el sueño colectivo, expresando no sólo sus ansiedades personales sino las de la humanidad entera...” (Sábato, 1981: 185);

- *distinguishing repetition* - repetition of information in the context of differentiating one object from another:

“— Y en el que yo nunca pude entrar — concluyó, poniendo su mirada sobre los ojos de Bruno.” (Sábato, 2007: 31).

In Sabato's prose, the redundancy is primarily intended to contrast individual elements, as when in *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* Castel compares himself to a scene with a beach painting, which, in his opinion, represents a true message of desperation; or it is a matter of emphasizing (intensifying) the elements, when Castel wants Maria to describe him in detail her experience of encounter with him, because he is a fan of comprehensive descriptions. The redundancy in the function of isolating the features of certain elements appears in the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas (On Heroes and Tombs)*, when the specific features of Alejandra's character and her inaccessibility are pointed out, in the sense that the time of reunion should not be specified to Martin because she will find him spontaneously. In the case of Alejandra (moments of jokes, anger, silence, partings, long-lasting disappearances, occasional moments of serenity), the (un)spoken is understood to a greater extent if her world is covered by the term *el territorio (the territory)*, a part of which Martin could never become. Repetition for the purpose of avoiding ambiguity and achieving a “poetic effect” is especially visible when one encounters Sabato's personal views, most often through the hero Sabato in *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*: in that case the subject of conversation are the heroes of his previously written novels, the totality of human experience and consideration of evil forces, differences between art and scientific knowledge, great creators as witnesses of their time who are torn by writing, marginal personalities as great protagonists of the novels, differences between art and dream, etc.

Bal (2000: 102) considers repetition to be an important principle while shaping the image of a character. The repetition of the relevant qualities of the character contributes to the reader's more profound understanding which leads to achievement of clarity. Thus, Sabato emphasizes reclusiveness, shyness and timidity as the main characteristics of the protagonists in his novels. In *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* Castel explicitly presents his characteristics – initiating the conversation with people he underlines as one of the main difficulties he was facing, and throughout the novel he is terribly afraid of being left alone:

“Creo haber dicho que soy muy tímido; por eso había pensado y repensado un probable encuentro y la forma de aprovecharlo. La dificultad mayor con que siempre tropezaba en esos encuentros imaginarios era la forma de entrar en conversación (...) En esos encuentros imaginarios había analizado diferentes posibilidades. Conozco mi

naturaleza y sé que las situaciones imprevistas y repentinas me hacen perder todo sentido, a fuerza de atolondramiento y de timidez.” (Sábato, 2008: 9);

“A medida que avanzaba en estas reflexiones, más iba haciéndome a la idea de aceptar su amor así, sin condiciones y más me iba aterrorizando la idea de quedarme sin nada, absolutamente nada.” (Sábato, 2008: 87).

The heroes of Sabato’s novels are obsessed with finding absolute and unconditional love and are infinitely afraid of loneliness – so in the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*) we meet again with shyness and insecurity, this time of the hero Martin who unequivocally surrenders to Alejandra:

“Martín analizó el velador y se volvió a sentar al lado de Alejandra, con su espíritu revuelto, lleno de perplejidad y de timidez: ¿para qué lo necesitaba Alejandra? Él, por el contrario, pensaba que era un ser superfluo y torpe, que no hacía otra cosa que escucharla y admirarla.” (Sábato, 2007: 93).

In Sabato’s novels the lexis is an important factor when it comes to characterization of the heroes – all of them are restless, worried and full of inner turmoil, conflict and apprehension. Sabato emphasizes the states of their spirit by reiterating the events in which the heroes are trying to communicate or Sabato gives them freedom to present themselves as incapable of bidirectional communication. Therefore, the redundancy in this sense does not have the purpose of eliminating ambiguity or indicating features of individual elements of the statement. It is exclusively used in the function of intensifying the highlighted elements and their more comprehensive understanding.

Repetition is a term created by elimination of specificities of individual events as well as by keeping those qualities which such an event has in common with the events of similar kind (Rimon-Kenan, 2007: 74). Although in the Sabato’s trilogy the repetitive relationships of the protagonists are presented (their separation is shown by a lonely tunnel in *El Túnel* (*The Tunnel*), dark chasm in *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*) and an open abyss in *Abaddón, el Exterminador* (*The Angel of Darkness*)), it cannot be said that a complete repetition of events happens between the heroes. If the attempt to establish communication is taken for the central event of Sabato’s novels, then the differences in the presentation on that process are reflected in the change of the narrator, as well as in the duration of the narration itself about the mentioned (non)communication. In *El Túnel* (*The Tunnel*), Castel is the exclusive narrator, whereas the frequency of (non)communication is realized within the continuum of the text. In the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*) the process of (non)communication is interrupted and continues with the change of narrator, while in *Abaddón, el Exterminador* (*The Angel of Darkness*) the narrator remains the same, whereas the recipients in the communication flow are different. In such a discourse situation, the relative uncertainty of the situational context of the literary message is further clarified – in order to ensure that the point is made, the novelist tends to say the same thing in many different ways, and at different levels of structure (Leech and Short, 2007: 207).

Sabato resorts to redundancy, i.e. the repetition of relations between the heroes, in order to direct the reader's attention to the evolutionary character of the approach to the topic of loneliness and (non)communication – in *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* Castel's isolation from the world around him is radical, while the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas (On Heroes and Tombs)* presents a step forward, that is, a bridge in evolution – from the scream of loneliness in *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* to interiorized contemplation in *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)*. In the fourth novel, Sabato would have given a final response to loneliness and (non)communication – after the third novel, the research gives hope that the hypothetical protagonist of Sabato's last novel would start from a less pessimistic existential basis (Barrero Pérez, 1992).

### 5. Figures of syntax in the novels of E. Sabato

Figures of syntax occur by a specific arrangement of words in a sentence, whereby each deviation from the usual order of words achieves a stronger impression and enhances the reader's experience of literary texts. J. A. Mayoral (1994: 125) indicates that figures of syntax imply different ways of modification, i.e., violations of certain syntactic rules in defined contexts and in accordance with special discursive conventions. As a starting point for classification of figures of syntax, the category of modification of expression elements was used, i.e. adding and omitting elements of the basic expression (figures of addition and figures of omission) or positional changes of syntactic units within the expression (figures of permutation). The figures of addition, by which the basic expression is expanded, in the first place include *pleonasm*, in the sense of inserting appropriate elements of redundant character into the sentence construction, all with the aim of strengthening its expressiveness (Mayoral, 1994: 127). In this way, the atmosphere of silence between Castel and Maria in the novel *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* is specifically intensified:

“De modo que cuando la puerta del ascensor se abrió ya tenía perfectamente decidido lo que debía hacer: no diría una sola palabra.” (Sábato, 2008: 20);

“Parecía desprovista de voluntad; no dijo una sola palabra.” (Sábato, 2008: 23).

The listing of semantically complementary words is also considered as a figure of addition, where the addition can be achieved by the principle of coordination or subordination. In the first case, a rhetorical figure of *enumeration* is in question, within which, in the syntactic sense, functionally homogeneous elements are grouped:

“— ¿Pero cómo, cómo?... — pregunté con creciente ansiedad. — Yo he pensado en cada uno de sus rasgos, en su perfil cuando miraba el árbol, en su pelo castaño, en sus ojos duro y cómo de pronto se hacen blandos, en su forma de caminar...” (Sábato, 2008: 29);

“Sabato quedó paralizado por su actitud, por sus palabras, por su sombría y áspera belleza.” (Sábato, 1981:61).

The syntactic connection of the elements in each of the underlined sequences is reflected in the fact that each sequence refers to a specific verb and is in the function of the object. These sequences give an answer to the following questions: What was Castel thinking of? What was Sabato paralyzed with? In the first example Castel talks on the phone with Maria and tries to convey his impressions after a recent encounter. When Maria confirms to him that she also thinks of him, Castel impatiently asks Maria to explain to him all details she had on her mind; in order to come to an answer, Castel describes in detail what he meant –here the enumeration is used to show Castel’s fascination with Maria. The passage from the novel *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* displays the moment after the parting of the heroes Sabato and Agustina. After giving Sabato a vague explanation in relation to Nacho’s insolent behavior, Agustina ran away and Sabato remained surprised by her pointing out the horror of the absolute characters from Sabato’s novels, including her brother and herself.

The third rhetorical figure included in the figures of addition is *the epithet*, which is traditionally considered as one of the most effective means of decorating poetic discourse (Mayoral, 1994: 134). Bearing in mind that the main goal of using epithets is to make the noun more picturesque, as well as to draw the reader’s attention to the speaker’s sensitivity or to contribute to the depiction of emotions and moods, numerous epithets in Sabato’s prose style can be found:

“La observé todo el tiempo con ansiedad. Después desapareció en la multitud, mientras yo vacilaba entre un miedo invencible y un angustioso deseo de llamarla.” (Sábato, 2008: 8);

“...el recuerdo del encuentro era vigoroso y tenía la sensación de haber estado con alguien muy fuerte, de rasgos muy marcados, desgraciado y solitario como él.” (Sábato, 2007: 17);

“Cuántos horrores como el de ellos habría en ese mismo momento, cuántas desconocidas soledades en esa ciudad execrable? A sus espaldas, sentía el otro rencor, el de ella. Se dio vuelta; su cara dura, su mandíbula apretada, sus grandes labios desdeñosos mostraban que su resentimiento había llegado al límite, y que un poco más y estallarían esa caldera de odio a presión. Casi sin proponérselo, impulsado por su intolerable sufrimiento, Nacho le gritó que le había hecho él.” (Sábato, 1981: 408).

Sabato carefully shapes Castel’s expression when he sees Maria in the exhibition of paintings – the fact that only Maria’s look remained on the hidden motive in the painting represents an essential thing for Castel, because precisely that scene in the painting suggested the desired and complete loneliness. Thus, the epithets *invencible* (*indomitable* fear) and *angustioso* (*painful* desire) have the special strength as they evoke the intensity of Castel’s inner conflict – the desire to meet Maria and simultaneous primordial fear of ending his complete loneliness, because a possible encounter with Maria would cause Castel’s initiating of conversation. The desire and need for the next encounter continues in the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas (On Heroes and Tombs)*, because Martin, as a counterpart to Castel, knows after the first encounter that Alejandra is *distinctive* (being) of *exceptional* (qualities), just as *unhappy* and *lonely* as Martin is (*muy fuerte, de rasgos muy marcados, desgraciado y*



*solitario*). Apprehension and anxiety felt by Nacho at every encounter with Agustina are shown in a passage from *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* – Nacho experiences communication with Agustina as *horror* and *loneliness (soledad)*; with desperation and resentment he observes Agustina when she intends to leave and, as usual, to interrupt any attempt of conversation. Agustina's anger is reflected in the following epithets: *cara dura, su mandíbula apretada, grandes labios desdenosos (rough face, her clenched jaws, big contemptuous lips)*. In general, it is noticed that the adjectives of negative, vague, a bit obscure and disturbing connotation represent the constant in Sabato's expression; these are, among others: unhappy, lonely, apprehensive, mysterious (unknown), endless, gloomy, dissatisfied, insignificant, necessary, unbearable, etc. In order to emphasize the problem of (non) communication in Sabato's novels, the attention will also be drawn to the multiple repetition of the same syntactic units in certain places, which is always related with emphasizing the need for absolute love, although the word "love" remains unspoken. Repetition also highlights the emotional state of the heroes of Sabato's novels:

“— Prométame que no se irá nunca más. La necesito, la necesito mucho — le dije.” (Sábato, 2008: 25);

“¡Te quiero, María, te quiero, te quiero!” (Sábato, 2008: 40);

“Necesito saber si me querés. Nada más que eso: saber si me querés.” (Sábato, 2008: 41).

In the next group of figures of syntax – figures of omission, the expression is reduced by omitting certain elements within the sentence; these elements can be implied in order to determine the appropriate syntactic connections of elements given in the sentence and finally, in order to successfully achieve the correct meaning of the given expression (Mayoral, 1994: 139). The concept of the ellipse has also been studied in the narratology, in the sense of omitting parts of the story, and in that capacity it could be researched within the levels of narration; *the ellipse* here will be perceived as a figure of syntax, and contrary to the pleonasm, it occurs by violating the syntactic norm by omission, as in the following examples:

“...era áspero y violento, en toda su actitud se adivinaba el rencor. No sólo contra Sabato: contra la realidad entera.” (Sábato, 1981: 60).

The description of Nacho's behavior towards Sabato is given in the example from *Abaddón, el Exterminador (The Angel of Darkness)* and the underlined subordinate clause is actually a syntagma referring to the noun *el rencor (the hatred)* from the previous sentence – so here the expression is understood on the basis of the overall meaning with the previous sentence, since both the verb and the noun are omitted, in terms of concepts that integrate the given syntagma. It is also noticed in the following example of the dialogue between Castel and Maria in *El Túnel (The Tunnel)* that omitted parts in the elliptical expressions can be reconstructed in accordance with the communication situation:

- „Yo también — musitó.
- ¿Yo también qué? — pregunté con ansiedad.
- Que yo también no he hecho más que pensar.



- ¿Pero pensar en qué? — seguí preguntando, insaciable.
- En todo.
- ¿Cómo en todo? ¿En qué?
- En lo extraño que es todo esto... lo de su cuadro... el encuentro de ayer... lo de hoy... qué sé yo....” (Sábato, 2008: 29).

The synthetic nature of María’s discourse is reflected in the elliptical expressions used in phone conversation with Castel. While Castel shows her to what extent he thinks about her after the last encounter, María’s answers are vague and with minimal elements of expression: *Que yo también no he hecho más que pensar* (*I was also just thinking*) and it would not be simple to reconstruct the omitted elements out of context.

By using the figures of permutation (*inversion* and *hyperbaton*), the figurativeness of the expression is achieved by positional changes of syntactic units. Although the elements within a sentence change position, they continue to be in contact that implies their semantic connection (Mayoral, 1994: 149). Deviation from the usual order of words in a sentence (subject-predicate-object) actually emphasizes the meaning of an individual word, as in the following example from the novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*):

“Así que se sentía *solo, solo, solo*: únicas palabras que claramente sintió y pensó, pero que, sin duda, expresaban todo aquello. Y como un náufrago en la noche se había precipitado sobre Alejandra.” (Sábato, 2007: 196).

Although the noun *la palabra* (*the word*) has the function of the object, it is placed in front of the verb, which achieves the effect of sentence inversion and, therefore, the reader’s focus is also directed to the expressiveness of Martín’s loneliness. The repetition of adjectives *solo, solo, solo* (*lonely, lonely, lonely*) further nuances Martín’s loneliness. Change in the position of the subordinate and independent clause is also considered as an inversion, when the subordinate clause is placed first, although this type of inversion does not have stylistic features:

“Que fuerzas obraron sobre mí, no se lo puedo explicar con exactitud.” (Sábato, 1981: 21).

Contrary to simple inversion, hyperbaton is considered as a phenomenon of “narrower” violation of syntactic and semantic relations between sentence constituents (Mayoral, 1994: 150), and in these cases words can be inserted between elements of the syntagma. In the passage from the novel *Abaddón, el Exterminador* (*The Angel of Darkness*), in which the hero Sabato explains to Marcelo what the duty of a fiction writer is, two figures of syntax are represented:

“Hablo del autor de ficciones. Su deber es nada más pero nada menos que decir la verdad. Pero la verdad con mayúscula, Marcelo. No una de esas verdades chiquitas que leemos en los diarios todos los días. Y sobre todo las más escondidas.” (Sábato, 1981: 256).

The passage firstly contains the hyperbaton, when the second sentence: *Su deber es decir la verdad* (*His duty is to tell the truth*) is broken into two parts by the inserted phrase *nada más pero nada menos* (*nothing more, but also nothing less*). The ellipse can be found in the following: *Pero la verdad con mayúscula, Marcelo* (*But the truth with the capital letter T, Marcelo*) and *No una de esas verdades chiquitas que leemos en los diarios todos los días* (*Not some tiny truth that can be read in the newspaper every day*), when it comes to phrases in which the verb is omitted, so that the elliptical expressions refer to the verb *decir* (*to tell*) from the previous sentence and serve as a syntagma that additionally describes the object *la verdad* (*the truth*) from the previous sentence. Separation of closely related sentence parts, which represent a meaningfully completed whole, does not require changes at the semantic level, but indicates the informality of the discourse – in this case hyperbaton only achieves the effect of supplementing Sabato's shaped thought. The omission of the verb *decir* (*to tell*) in two sentences aims to draw attention to the key word, when it comes to writers who write fiction and that is *la verdad* (*the truth*), followed by the epithet *la más escondida* (*the most hidden*). Therefore, for the hero Sabato, the task of the writer of the novel is not to write about trivial, everyday topics, but about the dark sides and the subconscious of the tragic man.

## 6. Conclusion

Individual characteristics and stereotypical traits of the heroes in Sabato's novels are presented by researching the linguistic and stylistic system of communication among them – Sabato's heroes are reclusive, lonely and emotionally unreachable. The pattern of their behavior is based on jealousy, possessiveness and emotional manipulation. The vocabulary of Sabato's heroes is mostly related to their inner anxiety, expressed through the motives of (non)communication and loneliness in Sabato's prose; these motives are presented inseparably from the manner in which Sabato portrays the states of his heroes. The discouragement and listlessness of individuals form an integral part of the story of every Sabato's novel.

(Non)communication of the heroes in Sabato's novels is presented as a universal process; on the linguistic and stylistic level the (non)communication of the heroes in Sabato's novels is achieved through the communication model, based on the principle of wrong "coding" of messages. In conclusion, Sabato used the technique of simultaneous presentation of heroes' speech and thoughts, aimed at changing the point of view, tone and distance. The omission of relevant information in the communication flow of Sabato's heroes indicates the fact that the impossibility of their communication is reflected in awkward pauses and alternating in speech, while the discourse of the heroes in Sabato's novels is characterized by concise answers and unfinished sentences. In the avant-garde spirit, Sabato moved the boundaries within the field of the (un)spoken in narrative communication, which were set by S. Beckett.

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## LINGVOSTILISTIČKA SREDSTVA U FUNKCIJI (NE) KOMUNIKACIJE U DELIMA ERNESTA SABATA

**Apstrakt.** *Predmet rada je istraživanje lingvostilističkih aspekata prozних tekstova argentinskog pisca Ernesta Sabata, sa ciljem prikazivanja neostvarivosti komunikacije junaka romana: El Túnel („Tunel“), „Sobre héroes y tumbas“ („O junacima i grobovima“) i „Abaddón, el Exterminador“ („Abadon, anđeo uništenja“). (Ne) komunikacija će biti sagledana kao rezultat usamljenosti, nepoverenja i nerazumevanja junaka Sabatovih romana; dat je pregled diskursnih obeležja, odnosno govora koji Sabatovi junaci koriste i njihovih stilističkih izbora, u cilju ukazivanja na učestalost određenih leksičkih i sintaksičkih oblika u njihovom govoru, kao i na njihov smisao u tekstu. Rad ima za cilj da proučavanjem diskursa junaka Sabatovih dela ispita načine pomoću kojih se postiže usporavanje razumevanja teksta; proces razumevanja teksta sagledan je putem doživljavanja (ne)izrečenog u narativnoj komunikaciji, kao i razmatranjem aspekta redundantnosti u jezičkom izrazu. Pored toga, radom se ukazuje na zastupljenost određenih sintaksičkih figura u Sabatovim delima kao dodatnog sredstva prilikom istraživanja (ne)komunikacije na sintaksičkom nivou, a sakupljanjem indikatora karaktera Sabatovih junaka u tekstu, došlo se zaključka o individualnim i stereotipnim crtama njihovog karaktera.*

**Ključne reči:** *Ernesto Sabato, (ne)komunikacija, (ne)izrečeno, lingvostilistički aspekti, redundantnost, sintaksičke figure*



## SENSATIONALISM AS A MODEL OF NEWS REPORTING ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – A CASE STUDY OF MILENA RADULOVIĆ AND DANIJELA ŠTAJNFELD<sup>2</sup>

***Abstract.** The media play an important role in constructing public opinion on certain personas, topics and events. If they propagate stereotypes about men and women in news texts and articles, that can negatively impact the public opinion about violence against women. Although there are rare cases of the media trying to raise awareness of the problem of domestic violence and violence against women in general, the media mostly reports only on actual cases of violence when they occur. It is mostly reported in a sensationalistic way, which brings additional harm to the victims. In this paper, we researched in what way the news stories of raped actresses Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld were covered, i.e., how tabloids (Alo, Blic, Informer, Kurir, Srpski telegraf and Večernje novosti) reported on these cases on their front pages. By analyzing six daily newspapers (in the period from January 17 to February 2, 2021, and from March 23 to March 31, 2021), we found that the majority of these articles had been written in a sensationalist way, without respect for professional journalistic standards. Driven by the desire for greater circulation and profit, today's journalists of (semi)tabloid newspapers often turn a deaf ear to ethical norms, which every journalist should adhere to when performing his or her profession.*

***Keywords:** analysis, rape, half-tabloids, tabloids, Milena Radulović, Danijela Štajnfeld*

### 1. Media coverage of violence against women

Sexual violence has always been a way of imposing control over women, thus maintaining a power imbalance between genders and preserving male dominance (Popivoda et al., 2009: 6). This type of violence has several forms, the most common form includes sexual acts without the consent of the other person or using blackmail and/or threats or by using force to subdue the resistance to the unwanted acts. According to the book 'Rape is a Crime – a handbook for women survivors of violence', sexual violence includes:

- a) Sexual harassment – through an offer, a joke, through conversation or pornographic content (photos and videos);
- b) Sexual blackmail – a request or proposal of a sexual nature by a superior

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- (employer, professor, CEO, etc.), which conditions a change of position, grade, etc.;
- c) Rape – unwanted and violent sexual intercourse;
  - d) Forced sexual acts – touching the body, intimate parts of the body, masturbation, attempted rape;
  - e) Incest – sexual abuse by persons related by blood (Popivoda et al., 2009; 6-7).

‘Other forms of sexual violence are: sexual slavery, prostitution, women trafficking, child sexual abuse, pornography, forced marriages, forced pregnancy, premarital women’s virginity checks, etc.’ (Popivoda et al., 2009: 7).

Sexual violence and harassment are widely recognized as globally significant and widespread human rights violations. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), ‘35% of women worldwide report experiencing either physical or sexual violence from a partner or sexual violence from a friend, family member, acquaintance or stranger. Data from national studies and the police in various countries show a highly gendered pattern of sexual violence, with women continuing to make up the majority of victims and men, although not exclusively, the perpetrators.’ (Powell, Henry, 2017: 3).

The beginning of tabloidization is connected to the 19th century. Tabloids differ from the serious press in the choice of topics that are mostly from the world of entertainment. Their content is easy and understandable, and the term tabloid is associated with the content of poor quality and immoral reporting. According to professor Jevtović, ‘tabloidization in Serbia is reminiscent of a huge mousetrap in which a large number of mice, accustomed to all the dirty tricks, are trying to snatch small pieces of cheese in order to get a hold of as much power as possible.’<sup>3</sup> The task of the media is to raise awareness, to create a new system of values with different cultural patterns. The interest in tabloids is great, that is why they enable the information to penetrate the public quickly and strongly, and bring owners money and influence on the public. Journalism has an informative, educational, and entertaining role. In Serbia, when it comes to (semi)tabloid reporting, the last item is the most common, i.e., the entertaining role.

As stated in the book by Jevtović, Petrović and Aracki, messages lurk from all sides with the basic task of informing us, but also with the desire to entice, seduce and convince. ‘Short, large and creative’ is the basic motto, so we shape our consciousness not only under the influence of classical media but also a number of different forms that offer new meaning and consciousness to the mass audience. (Jevtović et al., 2014: 19). The authors say that good journalism means accuracy (conveying facts as they are, giving real meaning to what is said), balance (involving all stakeholders in the story), responsibility (towards the people being reported, but also towards the society being informed) and reliability (citizens can make the right decisions only if they are provided with quality information) (Jevtović et al., 2014: 47).

Neda Necić says that the media have a key role in constructing attitudes towards violence, the circumstances in which it is (not)tolerated, when it is repeated

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<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://www.danas.rs/nedelja/medijsko-reketiranje/>, retrived June 19, 2021

or condemned, and thus have a certain impact on the audience. The way in which the audience creates attitudes about gender and gender roles usually depends on the media. (Necić, 2019: 38). On the basis of such representation of women and men, a picture of violence against women is built.

‘The media write about violence only when it happens, and there are a small number of analytical and preventive texts that indicate the need to prevent it (Aleksić, Đorgović, 2011: 53-61). Some authors distinguish two tendencies in contemporary media practice when it comes to reporting on this topic’ (Mršević, 2013: 135-136; Vulić, Pavlović, 2014: 116-117; Mršević 2015: 61, by Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017: 14). With the sensationalist way of reporting on violence the media do not provide support to victims of violence, while with the analytical approach, through professional reporting, they point out the problem and actions in the fight against violence.

When violence against women is reported, it is most often sexual and physical violence, while other types of violence, such as economic and psychological, are omitted or insufficiently present (Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017: 14). ‘Media reporting on violence against women and violence in general, on the social context in which it occurs and the position of women are a good and useful source of information’ (Mršević, 2008: 71). In the race for profit, through sensationalism, they sell ugly titles, photos, and texts. One of the well-known examples of poor reporting on this topic is ‘media lynching of Ksenija Pajčin’ (Mršević, 2008: 72), when the print media hinted on their front pages day after day what could have been the motive for the brutal murder of the pop singer, calling the murder ‘the tragic end of great love.’ Instead of reporting and raising awareness about the problem of violence against women, the lack of reaction of the police and other institutions to the reports against the perpetrators, the media glorified the crime, and in a way justified it. Later, (semi) tabloids once again proved that they didn’t learn from their mistakes when they reported on the murder of Novi Sad model Vladislava Cervenko in 2014 and on the murder of singer Jelena Marjanović in 2016.

‘There are many elements of media reporting on violence against women, which can be corrected by a more professional approach, and, above all, by eliminating stereotypical portrayal of gender relations, as well as social and family roles and life’s adversities of women’ (Mršević, 2008: 72).

Journalists often justify and encourage violence by perpetuating stereotypes about men and women in articles, regardless of the fact that that wasn’t the intention of the text. However, there are positive examples when by reporting on violence against women, they inform the public and raise awareness on this problem, its causes, and consequences. ‘Words and constructions used for the titles of the articles or the announcement of the report are of special importance because they directly suggest what attitude the audience should take towards the problem/content of the article. An inappropriate title can relativize responsibility and diminish the experience of real consequences (murder for instance) and that is why the role of the editor is important here as well’ (Mršević, 2008: 76).



‘If the media wrote about it like this, if the media have already condemned the victim, how would anyone believe me? So, I would be like this woman from the article accused of causing violence or that the problem was in me... they (victims) become even more demotivated. Also, with such reporting, the media create an atmosphere in society so that the victim’s environment begins to believe that she caused the violence, that she is guilty, that something is wrong with her and thus reduces the support she can get in her environment from family members or friends’ (Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017, by Necić, 2019: 45).

Journalists who report on violence against women must know and understand the key characteristics of this problem, neither harming the victim by their texts and articles, nor condemning anyone until the court proves that someone is guilty, because that would be a violation of the Code of Journalists of Serbia. Expertise is crucial when it comes to eliminating the popular ‘three S’s’ (sex, scandal, and spectacle) in reporting on violence against women (Mršević, 2008: 78). The mass media have a big role in creating public opinion, so journalists who write and report, especially on sensitive topics, must respect the Code of Journalists of Serbia.

‘We live in a time where profit is pursued in every sphere and every goal justifies the means. It is this race for profit and competition that encourages journalists to violate the code of ethics for the sake of sales and harm the dignity of the victim’ (Necić, 2019: 45). Abominable front pages, headlines, and texts full of trivial information, photos, fill the pages of (semi)tabloids for the purpose of greater circulation and sales.

‘Media articles are therefore a kind of speech of a culture. The fact that similar messages are generated by very different media indicates the existence of a dominant policy of representation that is in line with current cultural patterns. With individual messages, meanings are multiplied and amplified, forming interpretive frameworks in which new messages are later easier to interpret and understand. They build a common understanding of the world and a collective sense of community. By using these patterns, the media carefully cultivates desirable notions of gender identities and roles. From the symbolic exclusion to the ‘ghettoization’ of women’s experiences and interests, they all have a common product – symbolic gender equality’ (Milivojević, 2004: 44, by Necić, 2019: 45).

Such texts are with the statements of relatives, colleagues, friends, ‘close sources’, while in a large number of cases experts are ignored. ‘Their statements sometimes represent the only source of information about the existence of decades of violence, but also about the unsuccessful attempts of the victim to obtain help from the competent institutions’ (Mršević, 2013: 27, by Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017: 15). Through their inadequate reporting on violence, the media can make the victim relive the traumatic experience she has experienced, as well as public condemnation (as happened in the cases of Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld).

As Malešević points out, *Večernje novosti* and *Blic* are dailies that have taken the position of a semi-tabloid daily press with numerous short news and reports, taking the position between the sensationalist and serious daily press (Malešević, 2018: 34).

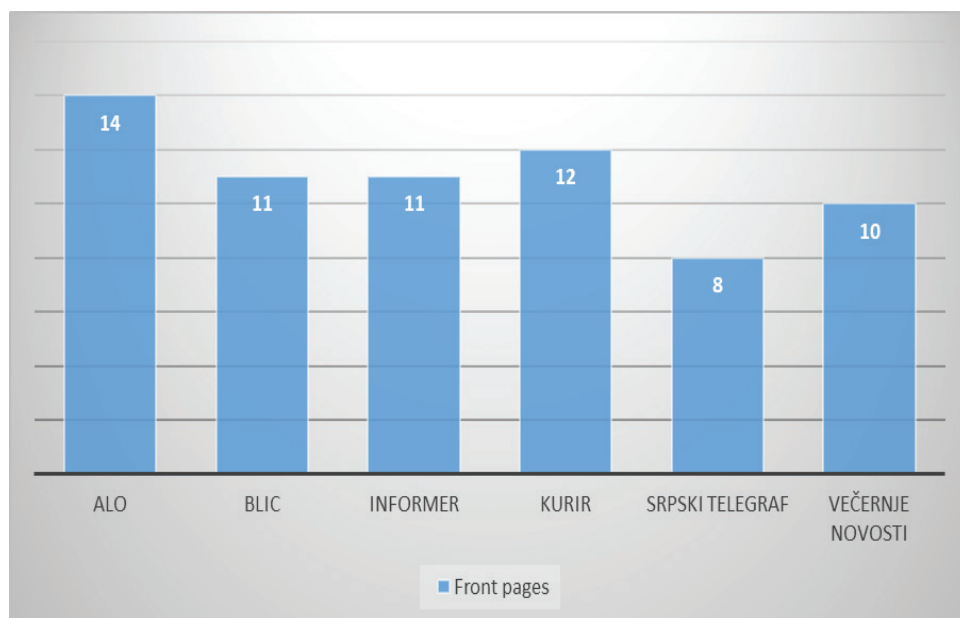
## 2. Cover page analysis

The analysis of daily (semi)tabloids<sup>4</sup>, in the period from January 17, 2021 to February 2, 2021, in the case of Milena Radulović, we found that this topic was represented on 66 front pages (*Table 1*) with seven consecutive days (from 18.01.2021. to 24.01.2021). In this period, *Srpski telegraf* and *Informer* also published double issues for January 23 and 24. The case of Milena Radulović occurred 14 times in the daily newspaper *Alo*, and *Kurir* wrote on 12 front pages on this topic, while *Blic* and *Informer* reported on this on 11 front pages each. *Srpski telegraf* (8) and *Večernje novosti* (10) wrote the least about this case on the front pages (*Graph 1*).

**Table 1:** Representation of Milena Radulović's case on the front pages of (semi) tabloids

Date	Alo	Blic	Informer	Kurir	Srpski telegraf	Večernje novosti	In total
17.01.2021.	/	1	/	/	/	/	1
18.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
19.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
20.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
21.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
22.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
23.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
24.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
25.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	/	1	5
26.01.2021.	1	/	1	1	/	1	4
27.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	/	5
28.01.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
29.01.2021.	1	1	1	/	/	1	4
30.01.2021.	/	/	/	1	/	/	1
31.01.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
01.02.2021.	/	/	/	1	/	/	1
02.02.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
<b>In total</b>	14	11	11	12	8	10	66

<sup>4</sup> As Malešević writes, *Večernje novosti* and *Blic* are dailies that have taken the position of a semi-tabloid daily press with numerous short news and reports, taking a position between the sensationalist and serious daily press (Malešević, 2018: 34).



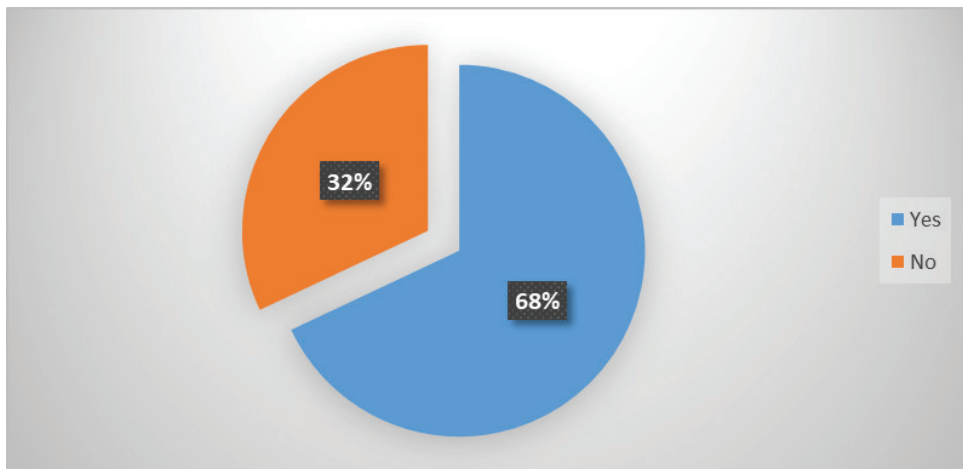
**Graph 1:** Representation of the case of Milena Radulović on the front pages of (semi) tabloids

*Blic* was the first to report on this topic on the front page (January 17, 2021). Only *Srpski telegraf* did not put the case of actress Milena Radulović on the front page on January 25, and the next day, January 26, in addition to *Srpski telegraf*, *Blic* did not write about this topic on its front page. *Alo*, *Blic*, *Informer*, *Kurir* and *Srpski telegraf* wrote about Milena on the front pages on January 27, while on January 28, this topic was on the front page of the daily newspaper *Alo*. The actress' case was the subject of four front pages (*Alo*, *Blic*, *Informer* and *Večernje novosti*) on January 29, and one each on January 30 (*Kurir*), January 31 (*Alo*), February 1 (*Kurir*) and February 2 (*Alo*). Out of the total number of analyzed daily newspapers (102), 66 (65%) had the case of Milena Radulović on their front pages, i.e., they did not report on this on 36 front pages, i.e., 35 percent of the total.

Qualitative-quantitative analysis of the front pages (*Alo*, *Blic*, *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Srpski telegraf* and *Večernje novosti*) (Photo 1) found that in the case of actress Milena Radulović and Miroslav Aleksić, in the period from January 17, 2021 to February 2. In 2021, there were 45 violations of the Code of Journalists of Serbia (68%) out of a total of 66 front pages that reported on this topic. This meant that the Code, when it came to this topic, was not violated on 21 (32%) front pages (Graph 2).



Photo 1: Examples of front pages of (semi) tabloids - the case of Milena Radulović  
 Source: telegraf.rs; instagram.com/naslovnestrane365



Graph 2: Violation of the code on the front pages in reporting on the Radulović-Aleksić case

The code was most often violated by the daily newspapers *Alo*, *Blic* and *Informer* (9 times each), as well as the newspaper *Kurir* (8). *Srpski telegraf* and *Večernje novosti* violated the Code the least on their front pages (5 times each) in reporting on the case of actress Milena Radulović and her acting teacher Miroslav Aleksić.

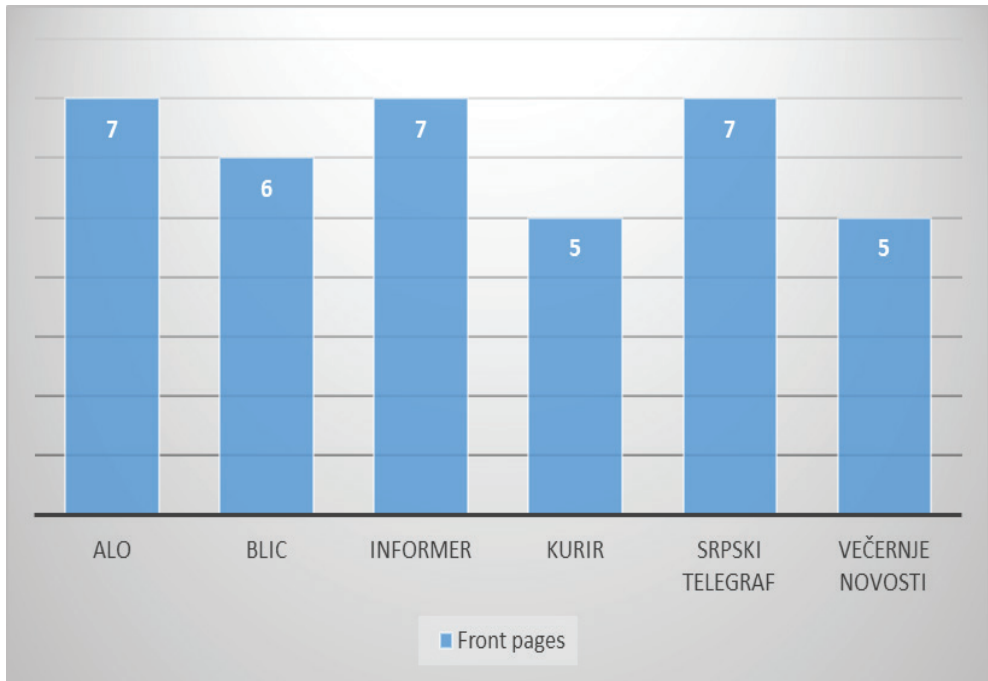
The sections of the Code of Journalists of Serbia that have been violated (most times) were: I – Truthfulness of reporting, IV – Responsibility of journalists, V – Journalistic attention, VII – Respect for privacy and VIII – Use of honorable resources.

Although the media reported on the case of Danijela Štajnfeld at the end of August 2020, when she revealed in her documentary ‘Hold me tight’ that she was raped by a powerful man from the film industry, in this research we covered the front pages of (semi)tabloids in the period from March 23, 2021 until March 31, 2021, when Danijela revealed the name of the alleged rapist to *Insajder*<sup>5</sup>. During this period, 37 articles were written about this topic (*Table 2*). Danijela Štajnfeld’s case was found on the front pages of *Večernje novosti* and *Kurir* the least (5) times, while it was found on 6 front pages of *Blic*. Most times (7) this case appeared on the front pages of the tabloids *Alo*, *Informer* and *Srpski telegraf* (*Graph 3*).

**Table 2:** Representation of Daniela Štajnfeld’s case on the front pages of (semi) tabloids

Date	<i>Alo</i>	<i>Blic</i>	<i>Informer</i>	<i>Kurir</i>	<i>Srpski telegraf</i>	<i>Večernje novosti</i>	In total
23.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
24.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
25.03.2021.	1	1	1	/	1	1	5
26.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
27.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
28.03.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
29.03.2021.	1	/	1	/	1	/	3
30.03.2021.	/	1	1	/	1	/	3
31.03.2021.	/	/	/	1	/	/	1
In total	7	6	7	5	7	5	37

<sup>5</sup> Danijela’s interview for *Insajder*: <https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/tema/23273/>, retrived June 10 2021



**Graph 3:** Representation of Danijela Štajnfeld’s case on the front pages of (semi)tabloids

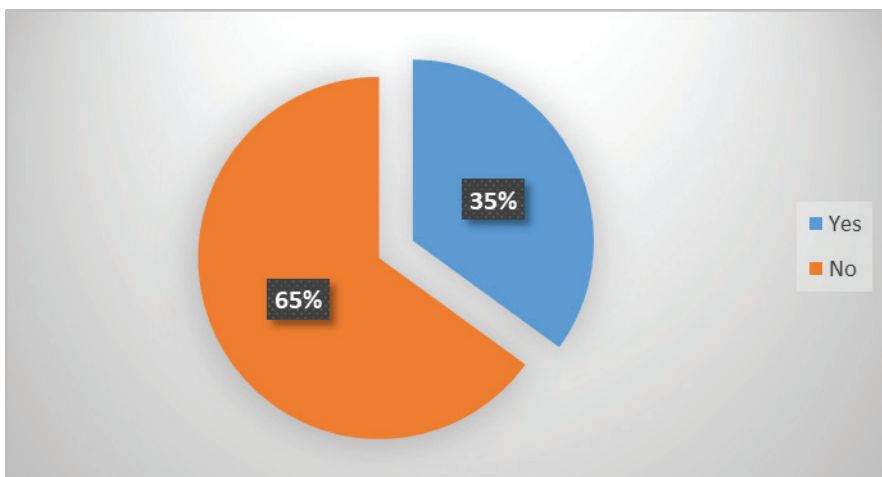
All (semi)tabloids reported on the case of the actress on their front pages on March 23, March 24, March 26 and March 27, while on March 25, only *Kurir* didn’t write about this topic on its front page. *Alo* was the only newspaper to have the case of Danijela Štajnfeld on the front page on March 28. *Alo*, *Informer* and *Srpski telegraf* wrote about the Štajnfeld-Lečić case on March 29, and on March 30, *Blic*, *Informer* and *Srpski telegraf* wrote about it on the front pages. The only newspaper that dedicated its front page space to this case on March 31 is *Kurir*. Out of the total number of 54 daily newspapers, 37 had on front pages (69%) the case of Danijela Štajnfeld, i.e., they did not report on it on 17 front pages (31%).

In the case of Štajnfeld-Lečić, the Code of Journalists of Serbia was not violated 24 times on the front pages (*Photo 2*), i.e., 65 percent, out of a total of 37 front pages with this topic, but it was violated 13 times (35 percent) (*Graph 4*).





Foto 2: Examples of (semi) tabloid front pages - the case of Danijela Štajnfelđ  
Source: telegraf.rs; instagram.com/naslovnestrane365



Graph 4: Violation of the code on the front pages in reporting on the Štajnfelđ-Lečić case



*Srpski telegtaf* (4) has violated the Code of Journalists of Serbia in reporting on this case on its front pages most often. The daily newspapers *Alo* and *Večernje novosti* violated the Code 3 times each, while *Blic*, *Informer* and *Kurir* violated the Code twice.

As in the case of Radulović-Aleksić, the sections of the Code of Journalists of Serbia that have been violated (most times) are: I – Truthfulness of reporting, IV – Responsibility of journalists, V – Journalistic attention, VII – Respect for privacy and VIII – Use of honorable resources.

Based on the analysis of the front pages of (semi)tabloids (*Alo*, *Blic*, *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Srpski telegraf* and *Večernje novosti*), when it comes to reporting on the cases of actresses Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld, we can conclude that (semi)tabloids equally violate the Journalists' Code Serbia when they report on such sensitive topics on their front pages. What they most often publish are accusations and blaming the defendants, before the verdicts were rendered, as well as publishing details of their confessions, statements of colleagues/friends/family/experts regarding the case, and photos, which can harm the victims.

### 3. Conclusion

The media, especially tabloids and semi-tabloids, violate the Journalists' Code on a daily basis with their reporting style. Sensitive topics, such as violence against women, children and domestic violence, suicide, bullying, etc., are presented in most media in an unprofessional way, trivialized and banalized. The code is mostly violated by relativizing violence, violating the right to privacy, dignity and integrity of the people that are written about, but also by violating the presumption of innocence. Disclosure of information that indicates the identity of the victim, even minors, is not rare. Craving for clicks, higher circulation and earnings, (semi) tabloids do not care whether they will cause even greater damage to victims and their families, but are primarily focused on the clickability of the headlines, which gives them an advantage in the fierce fight for advertisers. In this regard, media produce articles that are not in public interest and that encroach on the private sphere, and apart from the financial earnings, they only serve to satisfy the most primitive human urges. With this research, we found that journalists once again failed when it comes to reporting on sensitive social topics. Journalistic responsibility, sensibility and consistency in reporting on the Radulović-Aleksić and Štajnfeld-Lečić cases almost did not exist.

By quantitative-qualitative analysis of daily newspapers in the case study of actresses Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld, we determined that the media violated the Code of Journalists of Serbia. Out of 66 front pages related to the case of Milena Radulović, the Code was violated 45 times, which is 68 percent of the total number of front pages on which (semi)tabloids reported about it, while 21 front pages (32 percent) were in accordance with the Code's rules. When it comes to the Štajnfeld-Lečić case, the media wrote about it on 37 front pages, of which 13 (35

percent) violated the guidelines of the Code and 24, (65 percent) were in accordance with the Code of Journalists of Serbia.

Among the consequences of an inadequate, i.e., unethical and sensationalist approach to such topics is the normalization of such content, as well as the secondary victimization of victims who are reported on, but also of all others who share such experiences. In order to prevent such behavior of media workers, it is necessary that social responsibility prevails instead of profit. Journalists who report on these issues must be sufficiently educated and sensitized so as not to report on individual cases, but to offer the public a broader picture, with the obligatory consultation of experts in relevant fields. The focus of media content must be what the public has an interest in knowing, and not gossip, speculation and statements of anonymous 'well-informed sources'. In the modern multimedia society, all actors in the public sphere have access to numerous contents that prescribe adequate ways of covering sensitive topics and reporting on vulnerable and marginalized groups. However, what is necessary is a greater will of media professionals, i.e., that the educational role of the media takes over the role of entertainment, which should not be associated with such topics.

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## SENZACIONALIZAM KAO MODEL IZVEŠTAVANJA O NASILJU NAD ŽENAMA – STUDIJA SLUČAJA MILENA RADULOVIĆ I DANIJELA ŠTAJNFELD

**Apstrakt.** *Mediji imaju važnu ulogu u konstruisanju stava u javnosti o određenim ličnostima, temama i događajima. U svojim tekstovima i priložima često plasiraju stereotipe o muškarcima i ženama, koji utiču na kasnije formiranje stava kada je u pitanju nasilje nad ženama. Iako uglavnom izveštavaju tek kada se nasilje desi, retki su slučajevi medija koji utiču na podizanje svesti o ovom problemu. Uglavnom se izveštava senzacionalistični, nanoseći štetu žrtvama. U ovom radu bavili smo se temama silovanja glumica Milene Radulović i Danijele Štajnfeld, odnosno na kakav način su na svojim naslovnim stranama (polu)tabloidi (Alo, Blic, Informer, Kurir, Srpski telegraf i Večernje novosti) izveštavali o ovim slučajevima. Analizirajući šest dnevnih novina (u periodu od 17. januara do 2. februara 2021, odnosno od 23. marta do 31. marta 2021. godine) utvrdili smo da je najveći broj tekstova napisan na senzacionalistički način, bez poštovanja profesionalnog novinarstva i novinarskih standarda. Vođeni željom za većim tiražom i profitom, današnji novinari (polu)tabloidnih listova često se oglašuju o etičke norme, kojih bi trebalo svaki novinar da se drži kada obavlja svoju profesiju.*

**Ključne reči:** *analiza, silovanje, polutabloidi, tabloidi, Milena Radulović, Danijela Štajnfeld*



## LOCAL JOURNALISM AND AUDIENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA DURING THE PANDEMIC CAUSED BY THE CORONAVIRUS<sup>2,3</sup>

**Abstract.** *The Coronavirus outbreak started in 2019, in the city of Wuhan in central China, right before it spread to the whole world. In such crises, the media have a very big role in society, and local media are important to inform citizens on a daily basis about events from the immediate environment. The study explores whether citizens living in the south of Serbia believe that local journalism is necessary and whether they are interested in local news, especially local news related to the coronavirus pandemic. In the research, we tried to determine how the citizens of southern Serbia evaluate the reporting of local media when it comes to the coronavirus pandemic, whether they consider reporting as objective and professional, but also if they notice omissions in the area of violating privacy in journalistic writing about the pandemic. The results show that the citizens of southern Serbia are interested in local news, as well as in news related to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. Also, the results indicate that the citizens of southern Serbia are informed through local media about important local topics, and especially about the facts and events related to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. Based on the obtained results, we have determined that the citizens of southern Serbia evaluate the reporting of the local media on the pandemic caused by the coronavirus as other important events reporting as objective and professional. The results also indicate that the citizens of southern Serbia do not notice omissions in journalistic writing about the pandemic caused by the coronavirus in the area of endangering the right to privacy, such as sensationalism, reliance on unverified sources, use of photographs without permission, and similar unethical practices.*

**Key words:** *local media, pandemic, coronavirus, journalism, the role of media, south of Serbia, audience*

### 1. Introduction

The relation between the audience and the local media is examined on a daily basis, especially in times of great crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic that broke out in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan in central China and soon spread to the whole world. The role of the media in such emergencies when the lust for

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information about a new and unknown threat to human life is great is reduced to the central role of the media defined by France Vreg: “Mass communicators (as professionals) collect information, create it into messages, communicate it to mass audiences through communicative activities and enable understanding of events in society and the world” (Vreg, 1991: 51).

A state of emergency was declared on March 15, 2020 in Serbia, due to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. Crisis communication during the coronavirus pandemic in the Republic of Serbia was often characterized by closed institutions, so that the media could not obtain relevant information. This is evidenced by the fact that the Government of Serbia stopped updating the coronavirus data only four days after publishing the first information on the number of people tested positive for coronavirus in municipalities (Kojić, 2020).

In addition to institution closures, the information problem grew when some media started spreading unverified information. Also, privacy is questioned in crisis situations, and this is shown by the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. This is confirmed by the author Jelena Kleut, who researched how the media in their reporting on the coronavirus treat the personal data of citizens (Kleut, 2020: 5).

In this study, the theoretical framework is based on the theory of uses and gratifications. The theory of uses and gratifications proves to be adequate in audience research when the motives for reaching for a certain type of content are clear, which is undoubtedly the case when it comes to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus or some other major crisis situation. (Kedžo, 2015: 32-33).

The study examines whether the local media in Serbia represented to citizens of southern Serbia an important and credible news source about the coronavirus pandemic, especially during the outbreak and virus spreading in Serbia, and whether citizens noticed the violation of ethical rules in the field of privacy protection.

## **2. Methodology**

The research objective is to determine whether the citizens of southern Serbia are interested in local news, and especially whether they are interested in news related to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. The research objective is to examine whether the citizens of southern Serbia are informed through the local media about important local topics, and especially about the facts and events related to the coronavirus pandemic. The research objective is also to establish how the citizens of the south of Serbia evaluate the reporting of the local media on the pandemic caused by the coronavirus, as well as other important events, whether they think that the reporting is objective and professional. The research objective is also to examine whether the citizens of southern Serbia notice omissions in journalistic writing about the pandemic in the field of endangering the right to privacy, such as: sensationalism, reliance on unverified sources, use of photographs without permission and similar unethical practices.

Hypotheses to be tested:

- 1) Citizens of southern Serbia are interested in local news, and are especially interested in news related to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus.
- 2) Citizens of southern Serbia are informed through the local media about important local topics, and especially about the facts and events related to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus.
- 3) Citizens of southern Serbia evaluate the reporting of the local media on the pandemic caused by the coronavirus and other events reporting as objective and professional.
- 4) Citizens of southern Serbia notice omissions in journalistic writing about the pandemic caused by the coronavirus in the field of endangering the right to privacy, such as: sensationalism, reliance on unverified sources, use of photographs without permission and similar unethical practices.

An online survey and in-depth interview will be used to test the hypotheses in this study.

### **3. Research results**

#### **3.1. Audience on the local media reporting of the coronavirus pandemic**

A total of 158 correctly completed questionnaires were received. The online survey was conducted in the period from February 8, 2021 to February 18, 2021 over the social network platforms Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The first group of questions referred to the respondent data in which there were six questions. Out of the 158 responses that researchers received, 77 respondents (48.7%) were female and 81 respondents (51.3%) were male. Most answers were given by those respondents aged from 19 to 29 and there were 93 of them (58.9%), followed by 28 people (17.7%) between 30 and 39 years of age. Fewer answers were given by persons between 40 and 49 years of age – 23 (14.5%), and 12 respondents (7.6%) were those between 50 and 59 years of age. Only 2 respondents (1.3%) were under the age of 18, and no one (0%) over the age of 60 completed the survey. The majority of people – 68 (43%) who filled out the survey were from a small town (less than 100.000 inhabitants). There were 65 respondents (more than 100.000 inhabitants) from a larger city (41.1%), and 25 from the village (15.9%). When it comes to the region, the largest number of respondents – 78 of them (49.4%) were from the Pčinja district, followed by the Nišava district – 65 of them (41.1%), and there were 9 (5.7%) respondents from Jablanica district, 5 (3.2%) from the Pirot district and one (0.6%) respondent from the Toplica district. When it comes to education, the most of respondents were college educated – 52%, there were others with a high school degree – 35.4% and 10.1% with a master/specialization degree. There were 1.9% of respondents with a doctorate, and only one respondent completed the primary school



(0.6%). Out of the total number of persons who participated in the survey, the largest number were employed (57.6%), followed by the unemployed participants (17.7%). Slightly fewer respondents were those who were primarily dedicated to studying (17.1%), and the fewest of them were seeking employment (7.6%). There were no answers from retired respondents (0%) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Data on respondents

Total sample	158	
Gender	Male	81
	Female	77
Age	Under 18 years of age	2
	19-29	93
	30-39	28
	40-49	23
	50-59	12
	Over 60 years old	0
A place of residence	Larger city (more than 100.000 inhabitants)	65
	Smaller town (less than 100.000 inhabitants)	68
	The countryside	25
Region	Nišava district	65
	Pčinja district	78
	Pirot district	5
	Toplica district	1
	Jablanica district	9
Education	Primary school	1
	High school	56
	College/faculty	82
	Master's / specialization	16
	Doctorate	3
Job	Employed	91
	I'm looking for a job	12
	I'm not looking for a job, but primarily dedicated to studies	27
	Unemployed	28
	Retiree	0

### 3.2. Audience interest in local news

Questions from the second group are related to respondents' interest in local news. When asked "how often do you follow local news", 55 respondents (34.8%) answered "occasionally", 53 respondents (33.5%) answered that they often follow local news, while 27 respondents (17.1%) rarely followed this content. If we compare the sum of those respondents whose answer was in some way affirmative and who occasionally, often or always followed local news with respondents who rarely followed local news, we can see that 131 respondents (82.9%) were more interested in local news as opposed to 27 (17.1%) survey participants who rarely followed this content.

When asked “which local media do you follow”, where respondents could mark more than one answer, 132 respondents (83.5%) answered that they followed the online media *Južne vesti*. *Niške vesti* is followed by 49 respondents (31%), and immediately behind them was *Radio Han*, followed by 45 respondents (28.5%). The online media *Jugmedia* is followed by 33 people (20.9%), and *Info Vranjske* by 32 respondents (20.3%). There were 17 respondents (10.8%) who followed *City Radio*, 23 respondents (14.6%) watched *Belle Amie TV*, while 14 (8.9%) watched *Zona Plus TV*. Ten respondents (6.3%) followed the *Niš TV*, and 9 of them followed (5.7%) *Kopernikus TV* and 31 respondents (19.6%) answered that they followed other media.

When it comes to the time that respondents spent daily following the local media, the most answered that they followed the media for less than an hour – 63 (39.9%). Slightly fewer respondents – 59 (37.3%) answered that they did not follow the local media every day, and 26 (16.5%) that they followed it for an hour. Ten respondents (6.3%) said they spent several hours during the day following the local media. According to the results, most respondents followed the local media on a daily basis - 99 (62.7%).

When it comes to the local community, the respondents were mostly interested in the field of society (37.3%), then politics (13.9%), and they were equally interested in culture (11.4%) and sports (11.4%). The percentage of respondents who answered that they were interested in the field of entertainment was 5.7%. The same number of respondents were interested in Covid-19, health (4.4%) and economics (4.4%). 3.9% of respondents were interested in chronicles, and 2.5% of respondents were interested in technology, while 5.1% of respondents were interested in the second area. The society section often covers other areas. This means that many news items that correspond to some other sections in their content, in most cases can be part of the society section. This also applies to news of a coronavirus pandemic. Although the virus appeared in March 2020 in Serbia, many local media still did not have a column “coronavirus” or “covid”, so all topics related to this area were classified as society topics.

The last question from this group was about the frequency of following the news about the consequences of the pandemic, where 50 respondents (31.6%) answered that they followed the news very rarely, while 45 (28.5%) pointed out that they followed the news about the corona pandemic several times a week. This news is followed by 31 respondents on a daily basis (19.6%), and 17 of them (10.8%) followed several times a month. 13 respondents (8.2%) followed once a week, and two respondents (1.3%) followed once a month. The sum of respondents interested in pandemic news, no matter how often they followed it, was much higher than those respondents who rarely followed the news - the total number of people who followed pandemic news several times a week, once a week, once a month, and every day is 108 (68, 4%). That percentage was more than twice as high as respondents who rarely followed the news of the corona pandemic.

### 3.3. Local media as sources of information on important topics

The frequency of reliance on the local media when it comes to information on important local topics showed that the majority of respondents - 53 (33.5%) occasionally followed this news, then 41 respondents followed it often (25.9%), slightly fewer - 39 participants (24.8%) followed rarely, and 25 respondents (15.8%) answered that they followed it always. The obtained results showed that, when it came to important local topics, the local media played a big role. The total number of respondents who occasionally, often, and always relied on their local media and through whom they were informed about important local topics is 119, which was a significantly higher number compared to those respondents who rarely used the local media for information on important topics.

When asked which media they followed the most often related to important local topics, respondents had the opportunity to choose multiple answers. Most respondents opted for the online media *Južne vesti* – 127 (80.4%), 40 survey participants followed *Radio Han* (25.3%), and 36 (22.8%) respondents read the online media *Niške vesti*. 29 respondents (18.4%) followed *Info Vranje*. 28 respondents (17.7%) opted for some other media that were not offered, and the online media *Jugmedia* was followed by 23 respondents (14.6%). Respondents followed *Belle Amie TV* less, 19 of them (12%), then 8 respondents (5.1%) watched *Zona Plus TV*, while 7 respondents (4.4%) watched *Niš Television*, and the same case is with *Kopernikus TV*, which is also followed by 4.4% of respondents. The minority of respondents – 6 (3.8%) – followed *City radio*.

When asked how important the topic of the coronavirus was for the local media reporting, 65 respondents (41.1%) answered that it was not very important to them, a bit fewer – 43 of them (27.2%) said that it was very important, and for 25 respondents (15.8%) it was irrelevant. For 14 survey participants (8.9%) the topic was of little importance, and for 11 of them (7%) it was of very little importance. If we add up the number of respondents to whom the topic is unimportant, little important and very little important, we get a total number of 50 respondents who did not think that the topic of coronavirus was so important for reporting. On the other hand, a total of 108 respondents believed that it was important for them that the local media reported on the epidemic caused by the coronavirus.

When asked if they started following some local media just because they provided the information about the pandemic, 140 respondents (88.6%) gave a negative answer, and 18 of them (11.4%) started following some local media for that reason.

During the previous year, 47 respondents (29.7%) followed the ‘society’ topics in the local media, 29 participants (18.4%) on ‘politics’, 21 respondents (13.3%) opted for ‘sports’, and 17 of them (10.8%) opted for the section ‘Covid19/health’. 10 (6.3%) respondents followed ‘culture’, another area not listed by 9 (5.7%) people and 8 (5.1%) survey participants followed ‘crime’ sections. There were 7 respondents (4.4%) who followed ‘economy’ and the same number of respondents 7 (4.4%) followed ‘entertainment’. Only 3 participants (1.9%) opted for ‘technology’.

Almost one third of the respondents followed the ‘society’ section in the past year, so that area was at the top when it comes to the interest of the survey participants. The area of ‘Covid 19/health’ came fourth. As we mentioned earlier in this study, most local media published topics about coronavirus in the society section.

### **3.4. How do respondents evaluate local media reporting?**

The fourth group includes questions related to the assessment of local media reporting given by respondents. When it comes to reporting about important topics in local media, most respondents – 55 (34.8%) rated local media reporting with a score of 3, then 53 (33.5%) with a score of 4, while 24 respondents (15.2%) rated it with 5. Grade 2 was given by 18 respondents (11.4%) and only 8 participants (5.1%) reported the lowest grade of 1. The results showed that most respondents believed that local media reporting about important topics was very good. Almost the same number of respondents gave a grade of 3 and 4, which were high grades, followed immediately by respondents who believed that this reporting was at the highest level (grade 5). A very small number of survey participants considered reporting to be at the low level, as a total of 26 respondents gave grades 1 and 2. Reporting by the local media during the coronavirus pandemic was assessed by 106 respondents (67.1%) as objective, 52 respondents (32.9%) thought that reporting was biased. 104 (65.8%) respondents answered that the local media reported on the coronavirus professionally, while 54 survey participants (34.2%) answered that the local media reported unprofessionally on this topic. Reporting of the local media about events related to the coronavirus pandemic was assessed by the majority of respondents with a grade of 4 – 60 of them (37.9%), and a score of 3 was given by 43 respondents (27.2%). Twenty respondents (12.7%) opted for grade 2, and the same number – 20 of them (12.7%), gave the maximum grade of 5. The lowest grade 1 was given by the minority of respondents – 15 of them (9.5%). Previous data on the objectivity and professionalism of local media during the coronavirus also confirmed the assessments given by the respondents to the local media when it came to their reporting about pandemic-related events. Thus, most respondents rated the reporting of local media with a high score of 4, followed by grades 3 and 5. The total number of respondents who gave grades from medium to high is 123 (77.8%). Only 35 (22.2%) respondents rated local media reporting on the pandemic on a scale of 1 and 2.

### **3.5. The right to privacy during a pandemic and local media: an audience perspective**

The fifth group of questions focuses on the extent to which the local media respect the right to privacy during pandemic reporting. When asked how much the respondents trusted the local media, 48 respondents (30.4%) answered that they were not sure, 47 of them (29.7%) that they largely trusted their local media, while the trust in the local media of 34 (21.5%) survey participants was small. 27 respondents (17.1%) trusted the local media to a very small extent, and only 2 survey participants (1.3%) trusted the local media to a very large extent. The results showed that almost a third of respondents largely trusted the local media.

Information from the local media was periodically checked by 57 respondents (36.1%) and rarely checked by 46 of them (29.1%). A bit fewer – 29 respondents (18.3%) often checked information, 18 of them (11.4%) never checked, while the number of those who always checked that information was 8 (5.1%). The results showed that a minority of respondents always checked the information published by the local media.

When asked how the media reported on the corona pandemic, 110 respondents (69.6%) believed that reporting was ethical and 48 of them (30.4%) believed that the media reporting was unethical. The local media rarely endangered the right to privacy in reporting during the coronavirus pandemic – as stated by the most of the respondents – 61 (38.6%), then 49 respondents (31%) believed that this right was occasionally violated, and 29 respondents believed that it never happened (18.3%). Fourteen respondents (8.9%) believed that local media often endangered the right to privacy, and 5 survey participants (3.2%) claimed that this always happened.

According to the majority of respondents, the reporting of local media during the pandemic was ethical. This was because most participants responded that local media rarely endangered the right to privacy when reporting on a corona pandemic.

To the fifth question from this group on the media report during the coronavirus pandemic – 83 respondents (52.5%) answered that they reported without sensationalism, and 75 respondents (47.5%) thought that they reported with sensationalism. Although there was little difference, most respondents believed that the local media did not report in a sensationalized way during the pandemic.

100 respondents (63.3%) answered that local media used verified and unverified sources during the coronavirus pandemic reporting when invading privacy. A significantly smaller number of respondents – 34 (21.5%) answered that the media used only verified sources, while 24 (15.2%) believed that they used unverified sources. During the coronavirus pandemic reporting, the local media used both licensed and unauthorized photographs when invading privacy according to 100 respondents (63.3%). Furthermore, 45 of them (28.5%) believed that the media used only photos with permission, and 13 respondents (8.2%) believed that the media used photos without permission.

### **3.6. The relation between the local media and the audience in the era of the coronavirus pandemic from the perspective of a journalist: the case study of “Južne vesti”**

In this study we will use the in-depth interview with the editor-in-chief of the local online media from Nis, “Južne vesti” Gordana Bjeletić, to present the journalist-audience relation through analysis. The interview was held on March 12, 2021 in Nis. It was recorded and transcribed.

Gordana Bjeletić, editor-in-chief of the local online media “Južne vesti”, confirmed that the audience was very interested in the local news and that people followed them because they were the most important to them. People were especially interested in local news in emergency situations, which was the case with the

pandemic caused by the coronavirus, so the number of visits to the site exceeded the number of inhabitants in Niš. The number of website visits on a monthly basis was in the range of one hundred thousand to 2 million.

When it comes to the most read areas of these local media, society and crime sections stand out. However, Gordana Bjeletić believed that the current events were the most read at that time, regardless of which section they were in. Among other current events, the pandemic caused by the coronavirus topic has been constantly current since last year, and it had the highest readership. Thus, Gordana Bjeletić pointed out that readers were “very interested” in topics related to the coronavirus and in the beginning, when the epidemic broke out, the most read topics were the interviews with doctors and epidemiologists, as well as all information that was practical and useful – from examinations to tests, all the way to information on vaccinations and measures. The least read texts, when it comes to the coronavirus, were those in which statistical data on the number of patients and covid-related deaths were published.

*What is currently most interesting to the audience, our readers, are the measures. Since that is constantly changing now, these texts are really the most read and they come back there, the same readers check several times a day to see what places are open, in that sense the corona is still the most read topic ... but they are still the most read texts, it was about the virus earlier, what it was, how to protect people, and now about the measures, how people behave, what they are allowed to do on which day, what they will do which day and that is what is most read on the site.*

As Gordana Bjeletić points out, the first topic on the site of “Južne vesti” for the first two months after the outbreak of the pandemic was the corona. Even today, this media reports on the pandemic on a daily basis and in addition to topics dealing with problems, the reporting was also focused on positive examples, on people who tried to help others or do something good in challenging circumstances. To help the public, these local media introduced, in addition to the “Report a problem” application which existed before the pandemic, another application in which citizens could call and point out problems during the pandemic. Dozens of messages from citizens arrived every day. They also achieved interaction with their audience through numerous surveys that were part of the texts, and there was also interaction on social networks. According to Gordana Bjeletić, the email of the editorial office and emails of journalists are available to the public, which can be found on the website.

*My impression is that during the pandemic, we crossed a certain border between the media and the readers, a kind of human relationship was created, a closer relationship between us. Readers turned to us as friends, as someone who could help them. We received hundreds of messages and calls daily.*

The interactivity with the audience of these local media also influenced the fact that during the pandemic, in addition to informing the public, it had another socially important role, and that was the role of contributing to the visibility of the problems that people had. The biggest problem of the citizens at the beginning of the epidemic was that they did not know what the procedure was if someone got the virus, because



the organization of health institutions, as Gordana Bjeletić states, was at a very low level. Initially, there were phone numbers that people with symptoms could call, but the typical response given to callers was to stay home and take care of themselves. Bjeletić says that the biggest problem was that there were no hospital capacities, and the institutions ignored the problems of the citizens, so the media could not get any information from the Clinical Center in Niš.

*I can talk for a long time about how many specific problems we have solved; I remember a few cases. One day, two people told us that they had pneumonia and that they received treatment instructions. However, they were sent home from the hospital. We published the text and literally after about thirty minutes, both patients were admitted to the hospital. And now, on the one hand, it was very nice and we were pleased about it, but what about those people who did not call “Južne vesti” and who were not admitted to the hospital?*

Health institutions in the south were completely unavailable for providing information during the emergency situation in Serbia, which is why “Južne vesti” hired a correspondent from Belgrade to follow the conferences of the Republic crisis headquarters in order to inform the public. Gordana Bjeletić stated that the Clinical Center in Niš, as the largest health institution in the south of Serbia, to which more than 2 million people were referred, did not publish any information during the state of emergency, so she said that the institutions completely failed during the pandemic and adds that the information system was centralized.

*The institutions treated the citizens of this country in the worst, most inhumane way, because they literally hid from them the information that meant life at that time. In the beginning, you really couldn't get any basic information, we found ourselves in a very big problem, because you must not spread panic, you must not make it difficult for people who are in a difficult situation in that way, you must calm people down. On the other hand, you have institutions that are silent, that people don't know; people had nowhere to go for an examination, they were dying at their homes, the official numbers of people dying were hidden, people were left without advice, without an idea of what they could do.*

Reporting has to be at a high level and not deviate from the Code of Journalists of Serbia, so Gordana Bjeletić, editor-in-chief of “Južne vesti”, pointed out that they did not spread panic, and that they published only one misinformation. Then they conveyed the call of the authorities that everyone who had symptoms caused by the coronavirus should call a doctor immediately, but no one answered the phone numbers given by the authorities. Reporters maintained their professionalism by asking questions every day, even when the institutions were closed, so a lot of information was missing, but readers on the site of “Južne vesti” could always find what was missing and why it was missing. Representatives of the Clinical Center in Niš finally held the first press conference since the beginning of the pandemic in July 2020, after a letter signed by most journalists from the south of Serbia.

Citizens were also a very reliable source of information for “Južne vesti” during the pandemic, but the editorial office checked every information received.



In addition to the fact that citizens and readers were the source of information, their reaction to the reporting of these local media was positive, and in many situations, according to Gordana Bjeletić, they provided support to “Južne vesti”. She described reporting during a pandemic as a huge learning process, in which, as in any other reporting, only ethical reporting was allowed. On the site of “Južne vesti”, readers could not come across inflammatory rhetoric and headlines, catastrophic statements and unverified warnings. Gordana Bjeletić provided an example of receiving information from a doctor that the “Italian scenario” was happening in Niš, but since he did not want his name included in the statement, after consulting with people dealing with ethics, “Južne vesti” did not want to publish that text and spread panic. According to her, they showed through other topics that there is a problem, and forced the authorities to react in some way.

*We respected the Code even when the authorities did not respect it. We had a minister who spoke about some other diseases of the deceased doctor from Niš and we did not convey that. We literally had to act like a corrective agent and be highly aware of the problem all the time, because the situation required it. You can't be relaxed while there is a state of emergency around you and that's why I have that kind of positive feeling and somehow, I think it's an ugly situation, but there is a level of satisfaction in that sense because we didn't give up, we even raised the standard at that time.*

When they reported on the citizens, Gordana Bjeletić, the editor-in-chief of “Južne vesti”, said that they absolutely protected their privacy, and when it came to their audience, she thought that the audience trusted their reporting during the pandemic.

*I don't think we intruded on anyone's privacy at all. When people lose someone, when they are in such a terrible situation, they become vulnerable and they might say more than they should. It is your obligation as a journalist to exclude such things and other personal information which would leave them completely exposed. In order to write only what is important for the situation and what is important for the public, you must never cross that line.*

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results obtained by the survey of 158 participants, the first hypothesis was confirmed which stated that the citizens of southern Serbia were interested in local news and that they were especially interested in news related to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. The results of the online survey showed that respondents relied on local media when it came to important local issues, and that local media were important to them when reporting on a coronavirus pandemic, which confirmed the second hypothesis that citizens of southern Serbia were informed through local media about important local topics and especially about the facts and events related to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. Based on the fourth group of questions, where respondents rated the local media reporting, which

is very well evaluated according to the results, we could conclude that the citizens of southern Serbia evaluated the local media reporting of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as other important events, both objectively and professionally, so the third hypothesis was also confirmed.

Analyzing the results of the online survey, we found that most respondents believed that local media reporting during the pandemic was ethical, and even when the media intruded on privacy. Thus, this study refuted the fourth hypothesis that citizens of southern Serbia noticed omissions in journalistic writing about the coronavirus pandemic in the field of endangering the right to privacy, such as: sensationalism, reliance on unverified sources, use of photographs without permission and similar unethical practices.

When we compare the data from the in-depth interview with the editor-in-chief of the local online media “Juzne vesti”, Gordana Bjeletić, with the analyzed data obtained from the online survey, we get a more complete picture. According to the results of the online survey, the citizens of southern Serbia were interested in local news and news about the coronavirus pandemic, as confirmed by Gordana Bjeletić when she said that the audience followed the local media; it was especially interested in information related to the coronavirus pandemic which was documented by the fact that this news was most read on the local media website. Also, the citizens believed that the reporting of the local media during the pandemic was professional and objective, as well as the daily reporting and great effort to get official information, as confirmed by the example of “Juzne vesti”. Gordana Bjeletić also testified about the protection of citizens’ privacy and respect for the Code of Journalists of Serbia and ethical norms in reporting during the pandemic, emphasizing that the protection of those rights and norms was the guiding principle of the local media whose editor-in-chief she was.

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## LOKALNO NOVINARSTVO I PUBLIKA U REPUBLICI SRBIJI U VREME PANDEMIJE IZAZVANE KORONA VIRUSOM<sup>4</sup>

**Apstrakt.** *Pandemija izazvana virusom korona izbila je 2019. godine u gradu Vuhanu u centralnoj Kini, ali je potom zahvatila i ceo svet. U takvim kriznim situacijama mediji imaju veoma veliku ulogu u društvu, a lokalni mediji su značajni da bi građane svakodnevno informisali o događajima iz neposrednog okruženja. U radu se istražuje da li građani koji žive na jugu Srbije smatraju da je lokalno novinarstvo potrebno kao i da li su zainteresovani za lokalne vesti, posebno za lokalne vesti u vezi sa pandemijom izazvanom koronavirusom. U istraživanju smo pokušali da utvrdimo kako građani juga Srbije ocenjuju izveštavanje lokalnih medija kada je reč o pandemiji virusa korona, smatraju li to izveštavanje objektivnim i profesionalnim, kao i da li uočavaju propuste u oblasti kršenja prava na privatnost u novinarskom pisanju o pandemiji. Rezultati pokazuju da su građani juga Srbije zainteresovani za lokalne vesti, kao i da su posebno bili zainteresovani za vesti u vezi sa pandemijom koju je izazvao virus korona. Takođe, rezultati pokazuju da se građani juga Srbije informišu putem lokalnih medija o lokalnim važnim temama, a posebno o činjenicama i događajima u vezi sa pandemijom koju je izazvao virus korona. Na osnovu dobijenih rezultata utvrdili smo da građani juga Srbije ocenjuju izveštavanje lokalnih medija o pandemiji izazvanoj koronavirusom kao i o drugim važnim događajima kao objektivno i profesionalno. Rezultati pokazuju i da građani juga Srbije ne uočavaju propuste u novinarskom pisanju o pandemiji koja je izazvana koronavirusom u oblasti ugrožavanja prava na privatnost kao što su: senzacionalizam, oslanjanje na neproverene izvore, korišćenje fotografija bez dozvole i slična neetička praksa.*

**Ključne reči:** *lokalni mediji, pandemija, novinarstvo, uloga medija, jug Srbije, publika*

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## **LEGAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USER PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC REGULATION: THE VIEW OF MEDIA REGULATORY AND SELF-REGULATORY BODIES IN LITHUANIA<sup>2</sup>**

***Abstract.** Social media users are recognised to be a new actor in the field of public information. Their activities along with professional journalists' activities of providing information to the public differ. The changing field of public information and peculiarities of providing information to the public by social media users prompt scientific discussions on social media regulation in relation to information provision to the public.*

*The aim of the research is to determine the criteria for equating activities of information provision to the public by social media users with activities of public information professionals in the context of legal and ethical regulation of professional media. The research is carried out by analysing legal documents regulating the activities of Lithuanian media and social media, as well as decisions adopted by self-regulatory bodies and other institutions.*

*Having conducted the research, it was established that in Lithuania the criteria for equating SM users to journalists are the criteria of journalistic activity (functionality) and journalistic professionalism. For acknowledgment that SM users provide information to the public like journalists, criteria of information publicity, dissemination, accessibility, and possibility of information control are raised.*

**Key words:** social media, social media users, journalism, self-regulation, legal regulation, Lithuania

### **1. Introduction**

Researchers recognise social media (hereinafter – SM) as a new, distinctive part of the public information field (Kruse, Norris & Flinchum, 2018; Shirky, 2011; ect.). Activities of people on social media are defined as technology based social interaction, while the sharing of data, information, opinions (content) by individuals and communities acknowledges opportunities of SM in the area of provision of information to the public. It is also noticeable that SM activities in the public information field give rise to new phenomena defined in various terms describing the

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actions of SM users when providing information to the public: citizen journalism, community journalism, civic journalism, participatory journalism, etc. (Engelke, 2019; Roberts, 2019; etc.). These phenomena are characterised by the active role of SM users in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and other information. New terms have been coined to describe these SM users' activities: produsage and prosumption, which indicates their dualistic role in producing, using or consuming online content.

However, when comparing the context of SM and media, it is noted that providing information to the public differs in the media and SM: the number of topics covered simultaneously is greater on SM, its users decide on context, audience, purpose, and time of providing information. Peculiarities of information provision to the public on SM are also highlighted when comparing the activities of professional journalists on SM and information provision to the public by SM users: professionalism is frequently lacking when collecting information, the reliability of published information is not guaranteed, users publishing information may be biased, etc. Obvious recognition of differences in information provision to the public by the media and SM is accompanied by debates on the topic of regulating information provision to the public on SM.

Zankova & Dimitrov note that “respectively, the regulatory mechanisms that operate vis-a-vis social platforms should take into account their peculiarities and, at the same time, be adequate to the specific nature of the Internet” (2020:78). Therefore, when discussing SM regulation, various opinions are expressed about methods of regulation, different areas of regulation are emphasised, arguments are provided for special solutions and it is considered what regulation is purposeful (special or general). As regards SM regulation, both self-regulation and legal regulation is discussed, influence is assessed on dissemination of content when regulating the activities of SM platforms.

The aim of the research is to determine the criteria for equating the activities of providing information to the public by social media users to the activities of public information professionals in the context of legal and ethical regulation of professional media. The research is carried out by analysing legal documents regulating the activities of Lithuanian media and social media, as well as decisions adopted by self-regulatory bodies and other institutions.

To achieve the aim of the research, the first part of the study presents the theoretical approach and views of researchers towards SM regulation and regulation of providing information to the public on SM. The second part discusses regulations of providing information to the public by SM users in the context of Lithuania's ethical and legal standards: the Law on Provision of Information to the Public, the Code of Ethics in Providing Information to the Public, decisions adopted by the Ethics Commission for Public Information and by the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics, as well as relevant court cases in Lithuania (2017-2021).

## 2. Regulation of providing information to the public by social media users: theoretical views

Development of various technologies, application of technological solutions for SM activities (e.g., automated decision-making in news dissemination, tools expanding user involvement, etc.) increasingly consolidate the discourse of *legal non-regulation* of technology focused and Internet-based SM. This discourse changes legal regulations on SM with empowerment of subjects that guarantee their technological functioning (infrastructure, platforms, hosts, etc.) to take over certain regulatory functions. For instance, when presenting SM regulation ideas, Gillespie regards platforms to be the key regulatory concept, which he defines as: “[...] sites and services that host public expression, store it on and serve it up from the cloud, organize access to it through search and recommendation, or install it onto mobile devices” (Gillespie, 2017:1). Gillespie believes that standards of transparency and openness, and greater accountability to the public would be an appropriate direction for SM regulation. Clearly, the approach of technology-oriented SM regulation prioritises self-regulation, concentration of regulatory powers among separate participants of the digital information field. Balkin is of a similar opinion as he states that SM platforms may perform the role of curators and editors of public discourse seeking for public objectives (Balkin, 2020:90).

When empowering owners of private infrastructure (Balkin) and platforms (Gillespie) (hereinafter cumulatively – SM companies), these subjects are presumed to be accountable to the public, having the system of values accepted and supported by the public. What this means in practice is that the public space shaped by SM becomes dependent on separate values of SM companies and different rules laid down by them. Školkay (2020) notes that a phenomenon of “institutional self-regulation” is emerging in SM self-management, reflecting self-regulatory initiatives of SM companies and SM users. Self-regulatory empowerment of SM companies indicates their changing concept: SM companies are shifting from solely passive technological intermediaries towards active participants in the public information field, where SM companies combine features of publishers, media companies, telecommunications providers, and other firms. (Napoli & Caplan, 2017). Now SM companies function as traditional media companies: they carry out the gatekeeping function by monitoring, filtering, blocking and disabling access to content. However, current practice (the spread of fake news and hate speech, etc.) has proved that these initiatives and rules are ineffective, they do not guarantee human rights stipulated by laws. This highlights that orientation of SM self-regulation towards public objectives and related fulfilment of SM companies’ obligations must be accompanied by defined goals, officially known commitments and their compliance with legal regulations. Regulation of SM companies’ activities in the EU is implemented in this direction by adopting the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Single Market for Digital Services (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (hereinafter – the Act). The Act plans to establish general



guidelines determining Internet service providers' (intermediaries, hosts, platforms) obligations and accountabilities concerning removal of illegal content and human rights protection, including the freedom of speech (Proposal for a Regulation..., 2020). This not only highlights challenges in SM regulation, but also justifies the necessity of complex or mixed SM regulation, by combining self-regulation and normative regulation (as regards regulation of information provision to the public on SM). Rationality of such SM regulation is addressed by Balkin (2020), Cusumano, Gawer & Yoffie (2021), Gorwa (2019).

Although their editorial functions are increasing, the activities of SM companies continue traditionally to be defined *de lege* in the legal system as provision of content hosting services (Bartóki-Gönczy, 2021). Therefore, only legal regulations (concerning provision of information to the public) set under such definition are currently mandatory for SM companies. Legal regulations in provision of information to the public for SM companies are applied peculiarly – by foreseeing the possibility to hold these companies accountable for the content created by SM users who are provided hosting services, yet this responsibility may be eliminated by certain immunity conditions. Immunity may also justify SM companies' self-regulatory activities of content moderation created by SM users (by limiting access to content). SM companies are not empowered in the legal regulatory system for a different control of content concerning provision of information to the public on SM. Fagan states that such SM legal regulatory model is linked to SM companies' disposition to set SM content moderating policies that would meet existing laws (Fagan, 2020). However, considering SM companies' functionality, without a doubt, there may be a shift in the future to a more normative/functional approach in SM regulation.

When assessing provision of information to the public by SM users, it is noted that every person is guaranteed the freedom of expression (as a basic human right) and can participate in provision of information to the public using various means and channels. This means that any individual disseminating information on SM first exercises one's own human rights (applicable rights). Such activities may be described as empowerment or self-empowerment to disseminate information on behalf of oneself. In the flow of information created on this basis, news topical to the public is distinguished, whose production and dissemination may be deemed as provision of information to the public. Yet can provision of information to the public by SM users be equated to activities of professional journalists or can SM users act under a different status, that of a special journalist, i.e., be empowered to provide information to the public as a journalist? The answer must be sought in the definition of *the journalist*, in evaluation of the journalist's professional activities providing information to the public.

Roberts believes the activities of journalists are distinguished not only by the definition of the journalist, but also by the system of values (ethics) focused on public services (Roberts, 2019:7). Orientation of SM users' information towards public services may be described as dissemination of information and opinion seeking for a varied, critical viewpoint of the active society which ensures best-informed

solution of societal problems. Provision of information to the public by SM users is linked to shaping the public agenda and it is characterised by democratising effects on the media; in social terms, such provision of information has influence on solving social issues (e.g., impact of hashtag campaigns), which suggests that provision of information to the public by SM users is oriented towards public services. Bodrozic & Paulussen (2018) underscore that the role of non-professionals is important when covering problems that do not attract the attention of media outlets. Mutsvairo & Salgado (2020) argue that the extent of significance of non-professional provision of information to the public is decided by every country's social and political context, social and economic factors, political openness, and cultural norms. This proves the potential of SM users' activities in the public information field and possibilities for equating the activities of information provision to the public by SM users to professional activities of journalists.

The importance of equating provision of information to the public by SM users and journalists is tied both to certain privileges of journalists (e.g., source confidentiality, accreditation right, legal immunity, etc.) and to their rights and ethical duties. It is therefore meaningful to direct the search of criteria for equating provision of information to the public by SM users and professional journalists towards considering criteria of the functional activity, who is forming the definition of the journalist.

Researchers identify various criteria for the definition of the journalist. Roberts indicates that the fundamental difference in provision of information to the public by SM users and professional journalists is related to ethical values (2019:8). Martin & Fargo (2013) emphasize the important ethical principle of impartiality. Impartiality is also underscored by Papandrea (2006), stressing that the key criteria for granting journalists' privileges is provision of information to the public. Craft (2017), agreeing that adherence to values is a sign of journalists' professionalism, notices that when discussing professionalism there is an inclination to move from the form of professionalism to its function. Dunkle-Polier (2019) states that access to status or functions is used for this, adding that the functional definition also applies to SM users providing information to the public, and drawing attention that the goal or intent to inform the public becomes an important factor, while emphasis on remuneration and operation in institutionalised structures diminish.

The following criteria are used when describing the journalist in European documents: self-perception (person perceives oneself as the journalist, "intent to act as media"), function (the journalist is engaged in the collection and dissemination of information to the public, "working methods which are typical for media", with emphasis on "editorial control"), journalistic activities are also described as professional activities (based on regularity, remuneration; the latter criteria is identified as optional), as well as ethical activity criteria linked to professionalism ("reliability", "respect for ethical standards", "transparency", "accountability", etc.) (*Recommendation (2000) 7...; Recommendation CM/Rec (2011)8...*).

Analysis of research resources has revealed that SM self-regulation must be associated with legal regulation of provision of information to the public, which sets

objectives and limits on media content control. This shows that when evaluating the public information activities of SM users, it is important to determine the possibility to apply the criteria of a journalist to them. Analysis of research resources substantiates the following criteria for distinguishing provision of information to the public by SM users and by journalists: provision of information to the public as a public service, adherence to professional journalist ethics and features defining journalistic professionalism (or status). Analysis of European guidelines allows us to discern criteria of journalists: self-perceptive, functional, and ethical.

### **3. Criteria for equating provision of information to the public by social media users and by journalists: situation in Lithuania**

**Research methodology.** Analysis of official documents was chosen for the research: Law on Provision of Information to the Public (hereinafter – LPI), decisions of the Ethics Commission for Public Information (hereinafter – the Commission), decisions of the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics (media ombudsperson), and case law of Lithuanian courts in 2017-2021. The analysis of documents examines criteria shaping the conception of the journalist, as well as other criteria for application of legal and ethical standards in provision of information to the public by SM users.

**Research results.** The analysis of LPI has revealed that the purpose of the Law is to establish rules for collection, production, publication, and dissemination of public information, as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities of public information producers, disseminators, participants, journalists, and institutions regulating their activities. This means that LPI is applied very broadly – in its essence, it encompasses the entire dissemination of information to the public. This is affirmed both by the principles of provision of information to the public set in the Law that apply to all producers and disseminators of public information, as well as by LPI provisions dedicated to the freedom of information and its protection. These provisions stipulate that every person has the right to collect and publish information, as well as the right to receive information from state and municipal institutions and entities, and public information available to budgetary institutions about their activities, official documents (copies) and so on. It should be noted that in many LPI provisions the journalist is not distinguished as a target subject related to the rights of provision of information to the public, as producers and disseminators of public information are also regarded as such subjects. For example, LPI stipulates that the right to keep the confidentiality of a source and to protect against influence that would force media to publish inaccurate or biased information is recognised not only for journalists but also for producers and disseminators of public information, as well as for participants whose activities are connected to provision of information to the public in the media.

Yet LPI also has special provisions for the community of journalists in provision of information to the public: the Law sets special terms to obtain

information from state institutions (information has to be provided not later than within one working day; if additional data has to be accumulated, information has to be provided not later than within one week), information (received from a register or public information system manager) is provided free of charge. This privilege is granted to a journalist if a producer or a disseminator (editorial board) of public information, which the journalist represents, has not violated LPI in the last year and if the Ethics Commission for Public Information does not deem the journalist as non-compliant with professional ethics. As a result, implementation of this privilege is linked directly to adherence to standards of professional ethics. Another specific right of journalists set in LPI is accreditation with state institutions, political parties, political organisations, and associations, as well as other institutions on the agreement between these institutions and producers and/or disseminators of public information. Exceptional rights given to journalists are tied to the activities of a producer and a disseminator of public information and to compliance with ethical standards.

Both producers and disseminators of public information are defined in LPI as media companies, and as companies providing content services (hereinafter cumulatively – media company), and as natural persons (journalists, other individuals). A disseminator of public information is described as a content provider (audio-visual, TV or other), however, “any other person disseminating public information to the public” may also be deemed as a disseminator. A producer of public information is also described as content service provider (e.g., audio-visual media service provider, radio programme broadcaster), a media company (publishing house; film, audio or video studio; information, advertising or public relations agency; editorial board, etc.), and “an independent creator, a journalist or any other person producing public information or submitting it for dissemination.” The analysis of definitions of both producers and disseminators of public information provided for in LPI shows that these definitions are applied widely, while the main criteria is production of public information, its submission for dissemination and its dissemination, which ensure the activities of the media.

The fact that special rights of journalists are separated in the process of provision of information to the public suggests that LPI draws a distinction in provision of information to the public by journalists. Therefore, it is important to establish how this Law defines the journalist. LPI defines the journalist as a “natural person who, on a professional basis, collects, prepares and presents material to the producer and/or disseminator of public information under a contract with him and/or is a member of a professional journalists’ association.” It is noticed that functional criteria are used to define the journalist in LPI: the journalist is described based on actual activities – collection of information, its preparation and presentation to a producer and/or a disseminator of public information. It should be noted that when a producer of public information is defined not only as a media company but also as “an independent creator, a journalist or any other person producing public information or submitting it for dissemination” and when a disseminator is defined as “an independent creator, a journalist or any other person”, then it becomes obvious that a contractual relationship with a media company is not the essential criterion when defining the journalist. The

provision “and/or is a member of a professional journalists’ association” also does not suggest that membership in a professional organisation is a prerequisite when defining the journalist. Therefore, the conception of the journalist in LPI is described solely by functional criteria, whereby professional activities are emphasised (“on a professional basis, collects, prepares and presents material”), but there are no legal standards to describe professionalism.

LPI establishes the obligation for public information producers, disseminators, journalists and publishers to follow the standards of professional ethics, i.e., LPI authorises the Code in regard of all subjects acting in provision of information to the public, a self-regulatory body, the Ethics Commission for Public Information (hereinafter – the Commission), and a legal compliance monitoring body, the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics (hereinafter – the Inspector), operate in Lithuania’s public information field. The approach of these institutions towards the activity of subjects providing information to the public is important when seeking to determine whether provision of information to the public by SM users is distinguished and what criteria is used for that.

The analysis of the Commission’s decisions revealed that in the discussed period its findings specialised on provision of information to the public by journalists on SM. The Commission’s activities are related only to provision of information to the public by journalists, producers and disseminators of public information, as well as to ethical behaviour of these subjects on SM (their blogs or Facebook accounts, etc.). When examining complaints filed in 2017-2020, in six cases the Commission adopted decisions concluding that journalists clearly violated law and ethics on their social network accounts (e.g., No. EKS-23/19, No. EKS-14/18, etc.).

Meanwhile, the Inspector’s reports dated 2017-2021 state that a trend has emerged in the last several years with many complaints filed in relation to information spread on the Internet. Accordingly, a large share of them is over information published on SM. The Inspector oversees provision of information to the public on all media, regardless of who its producer or disseminator is, whereas decisions focus on legal violations in provision of information to the public committed by all subjects.

When analysing Lithuanian court cases (2017-2021) it is noted that in many rulings concerning provision of information to the public by SM users, courts cite the judgement of the Supreme Administrative Court (hereinafter – LVAT) in the case No. A444-70/2009. The citation is included in court rulings in appeals filed against decisions of the Inspector, where public dissemination of information by SM users is deemed to be provision of information to the public (e.g., EA-58-261/2020, EI-1073-1066/2019, etc.). Court judgements state that requirements set for the content of public information apply regardless of the form, method or genre the information is provided. Therefore, the form (genre) does not create grounds in terms of LPI not to evaluate information or to evaluate it differently than provided for in LPI (e.g. IK-2846-815/2011, A-556-1314-12) that “a website [...] both in content and form is not traditional media, but, having assessed the rapid development of information technology and shifting social relationships determined by this process, [...] based

on publicity of information, its dissemination, accessibility, methods of activity and possibility to control information, it (website) meets the criteria of information society media” (A-502-668-13). Lithuanian court rulings clearly highlight technological neutrality of provision of information to the public and recognise opportunities for SM users to provide information to the public. Provision of information to the public by SM users is ascertained acknowledging their websites as media, after consideration of criteria for website conformity to information society media as defined in LPI.

This is established in the judgment of LVAT in the case No. A444-70/2009, which deals with a request for accreditation to Parliament by blogger L.U. The Office of Parliament did not issue the accreditation arguing that the applicant was not a journalist. Its decision was appealed to the court. LVAT elucidated that by professionally collecting, producing, and publishing information L.U. acted as a journalist and obliged the Office of Parliament to grant the accreditation. When hearing the case, LVAT explored what the producer of public information and the journalist are and how bloggers should be classified when deciding on accreditation with state institutions. LVAT systematically followed definitions provided in LPI and concluded that natural persons may also be producers of public information. Considering the nature of activities of these individuals and their function in providing information to the public, they can be regarded *sui generis* as media managers, hence, also as producers and/or disseminators of public information, while their blogs – information society media in terms of LPI. LVAT elucidated on access to the blog in question (it was publicly accessible to everyone via electronic networks meant for public use). Thereby LVAT evaluated peculiarities of activities of bloggers and judged that they may be equated to journalists considering the nature of functions of providing information to the public. LVAT concluded that when a producer of public information and a participant is the same natural person, then this person is responsible for media content, i.e., the natural person who actually manages a media outlet, a blog, may be regarded as a producer of public information. LVAT stressed that when deciding on whether a person meets characteristics of the journalist, it is sufficient to determine if a person collects, produces, and presents information on a professional basis, which the person uses acting as a producer of public information.

This shows that Lithuanian court case highlights functional and professional criteria of journalistic activity ascribed to SM users. Functional criteria are determined taking into account functions performed by journalists, tying them to professional requirements and objectives of journalistic activity – to constantly and systematically produce and disseminate public information. It is also important to note that providing information to the public by SM users is also connected to the recognition of information provided by them on SM as media, whereas criteria of information publicity, dissemination, accessibility, and possibility to control information is laid down for provision of information.



## 4. Conclusion

The fact that LPI orients provision of information to the public towards a wide range of subjects, but grants exceptional rights and duties solely to journalists, producers and disseminators of public information proves that in Lithuania a distinction exists between journalists and other individuals engaged in providing information to the public. Criteria for the definition of the journalist is shaped in LPI on the grounds of functionality and professional activities. Exclusive rights are granted to journalists on the precondition of adherence to ethical standards, which allows us the conclusion that criteria of journalistic professionalism are consolidated in the code of professional ethics.

In Lithuania, self-regulatory bodies and institutions monitoring legal compliance do not distinguish SM users in activities of providing information to the public. The Commission's decisions apply only to journalists who violate professional ethics standards on SM, whereas the Inspector's decisions apply to all violators of law related to provision of information to the public. The Inspector institutionally monitors the public space in full extent and adopts decisions on all subjects that commit violations.

The approach of Lithuanian courts towards SM users in the context of journalists' exclusive right of accreditation has demonstrated that activities of SM users under the status of journalists are also linked to the acknowledgment of information provided by them on SM as media. For such acknowledgment, criteria of information publicity, dissemination, accessibility, and possibility of information control are raised. Lithuanian courts justify recognition of SM users as journalists on the grounds of criteria for the definition of the journalist (functionality, professional activity) established in LPI.

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## PRAVNI I ETIČKI ASPEKTI PRUŽANJA INFORMACIJA KORISNICIMA DRUŠTVENIH MREŽA JAVNOJ REGULACIJI: POGLED MEDIJSKIH REGULATORNIH I SAMOREGULATORNIH TELA U LITVANII

**Apstrakt.** *Korisnici društvenih mreža prepoznati su kao novi akter u oblasti javnog informisanja. Njihove aktivnosti i aktivnosti profesionalnih novinara u informisanju javnosti se razlikuju. Promenljivo polje javnog informisanja i osobenosti informisanja javnosti od strane korisnika društvenih mreža podstiču naučne rasprave o regulisanju društvenih mreža u vezi sa informisanjem javnosti. Cilj istraživanja je utvrđivanje kriterijuma za izjednačavanje aktivnosti informisanja javnosti od strane korisnika društvenih mreža sa aktivnostima profesionalaca za javno informisanje u kontekstu pravnog i etičkog regulisanja profesionalnih medija. Istraživanje je sprovedeno analizom pravnih dokumenata koji regulišu delatnost litvanskih medija i društvenih mreža, kao i odluka koje donose samoregulatorna tela i druge institucije. Sprovedenim istraživanjem je ustanovljeno da su u Litvaniji kriterijumi za izjednačavanje korisnika društvenih mreža sa novinarima kriterijumi novinarske aktivnosti (funkcionalnosti) i novinarske profesionalnosti. Za priznanje da korisnici društvenih mreža pružaju informacije javnosti poput novinara, podižu se kriterijumi javnosti informacija, širenja, dostupnosti i mogućnosti kontrole informacija.*

**Ključne reči:** *društvene mreže, korisnici društvenih mreža, novinarstvo, samoregulacija, pravna regulativa, Litvanija*

## **CRISTIANI AND THE FIRST ANIMATED FEATURE FILMS IN HISTORY- FROM ARGENTINA TO THE WORLD<sup>2</sup>**

***Abstract.** On December 21, 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand, Jackson, Pearce, Sharpsteen, Morey, Cottrell, 1937) was released, produced by Walter E. Disney. The press immediately ranked it as the first animated feature film. However, this claim was not true. The Italian-Argentinian animator Quirino Cristiani with his work *El Apóstol* (Cristiani, 1917) was responsible for the first animated feature film in the world twenty years before the North American release. His 1931 film *Peludopolis* (Cristiani, 1931) was also the first animated feature film with synchronised sound recording. Cristiani patented a new and revolutionary system for creating animations using only cardboard cut-outs. The aim of this paper is to give recognition to his work by analyzing his contribution to the seventh art through qualitative documentary research.*

***Keywords:** Argentina; Cartoons; Animation; Historical films; Quirino Cristiani*

### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to make an Italian-Argentinian audiovisual creator widely known, since he has not been awarded any merits for his work. Quirino Cristiani, a creator, designer, researcher, and overall animator developed all his work in Argentina, which did not help the expected diffusion of his work, together with the fact that the theme of his works were local and not developed in the major production centers of the time such as Los Angeles in United States.

The animation film technique is usually associated with animation in the United States of America and specifically the period from 1930 to 1986, its peak period. But animation was produced on all continents, albeit with better distribution.

### **2. Methodology**

The life of the author will be analyzed using qualitative research, particularly his first three films, namely the first film produced in animation, and the first film with a sound component. All of this occurred in a significantly unstable country, mainly due to political changes.

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On November 9, 1917, the feature film by the Italian-Argentinian director Quirino Cristiani, *El Apóstol* (Cristiani, 1917), premiered at the luxurious Select-Suipacha Cinema, located at 482 Suipacha Street in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

This fact was a cause for joy taking in consideration the childhood state in which Argentine cinema was at that time, and in South America in general. But to this we must add something else – that this feature film was unlike any other. It was the first animated feature film in the history of the seventh art. But why has not this work been recognized with the merits it deserves?

This article will explore the causal relationship giving an answer to the proposal presented. Its scope of development will be related to Argentina while attributing influences from other geographies or media. This article intends to study Cristiani's creative evolution, his contribution to the world of cinema and especially to that of animation, the reasons why he remains in oblivion despite his global importance and the key moments of his life and work.

Obtaining information has been very arduous, since on the one hand the laboratories and studies that guarded the material caught fire related to the use of highly flammable nitrate films. On the other hand, there are almost no bibliographic sources for the works – there are only two specific books (one of them is out of print) and some brief reference in a general film encyclopedia.

This qualitative research will analyze all the material that exists about this author. There is a documentary directed by Gabrielle Zucchelli and another by Diego Kartaczewicz, some short interviews with the author that can be found on the YouTube™ platform, as well as communication with his grandson Héctor Cristiani with detailed in-depth interviews. The published book by the Italian author Giannalberto Bendazi together with generalist stories or encyclopedias have been the only means that I have counted on for this research proposal, where the research sources cited are mere copies of one another.

The justification for this research is not just to obtain the greatest amount of information about the work of Quirino, as he required to be called, but rather to place it in a socio-political context that allows us to understand the creative act, why those films were produced, media, technology, reception by the public and dissemination.

The questions that will guide this investigation will be:

- Who was Quirino Cristiani?
- What was Quirino Cristiani's contribution to the seventh art?
- What motivated his work?
- What did it mean for the development of animated cinema?
- What elements influenced the course of his work?

### **3. Quirino Cristiani's Origins**

Cristiani was born in the Italian town of Santa Gioletta, in the province of Pavia on July 2, 1896. He was the fifth and last child of Luigi Cristiani, secretary of the city council and Adele Martinotti, seamstress. He lived a quiet life in the

small town with his siblings Francesco, María, Inés and Ángela, until the father was fired from his job between the end of 1899 and the beginning of 1900, for unknown reasons (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

This forced the family to move to Pavia, as at that time they were residing on a property owned by the town hall. But this would not be for long, as on April 11 of that same year of 1900, the family would embark on the ship *Messapia*, in the port of Genoa, a historic port city in northern Italy, capital of the Liguria region, the birthplace of the navigator Christopher Columbus (1451 - 1506).

Perhaps like the famous sailor, the four-year-old did not understand that this was the beginning of a journey that would lead him to become a pioneer in the art which was being developed at that time with the invention of the cinematograph by the French brothers Lumière, Auguste (1862-1954) and Louis (1864-1948).

Following its independence from Spain in 1810, Argentina began a policy to repopulate the new nation. The emigration of citizens, especially from Spain, Italy and the Middle East, was very high. The Cristiani family members were part of it (Abad de Santillán, 1971).

Luigi Cristiani had two letters of recommendation for the search for sustenance. One was for the Domingo Tomba Winery in San Rafael, in the southern part of the Mendoza province, located at the base of the Andes Mountains, which is the longest continental mountain range in the world.

Luigi visited this area of excellent wines with the aim of potentially settling there, but during his stay frequent seismic movements happened in the area. After falling from the cot because of these, he decided to move to Buenos Aires, the capital city, where he would finally settle permanently.

To do this, he would use the second reference letter to work at the Italian Hospital as an administrator. Once he got the job, he bought a house near the hospital, in the Almagro neighborhood. The Cristiani family grew up in a calm and comfortable environment (Bendazzi, 2016).

Cristiani had a passion for art and illustration. His father, however, wanted him to be a doctor and work with him in the hospital and tried to persuade him to give up his hobby. During high school, he would sneak out to take drawing classes with teachers like Lorenzo Gigli, Alfredo Guido, and Ángel Vena (Grupo6ilusroldan, 2018).

His father first got him a job as a shoemaker's assistant and then he worked in an insurance company. His father finally resigned and allowed him to enter a course at the Academy of Fine Arts at the age of sixteen, where he would meet great future artists such as Lino Enea Spilimbergo (1896-1964). He only stayed there for a few months, since the young man's emerging personality invited him to act in a rather free and bohemian way – in fact, this would become a constant feature in his life. At the age of fifteen he became a vegetarian and in 1920 he founded the first nudist camp on an island in the delta of the Rio de la Plata which he called *Heliópolis*, a great advancement at this time. To continue his learning on Sundays, he used to go to the city zoo where he drew the animals, while observing the work of other artists, especially Italians (Bendazzi, 2016).

In this historical period, two significant events occurred in the Southern part of the country. On the one hand, the first democratic plebiscite occurred in 1916 and the proliferation of high-quality publications, such as the newspapers *La Nación* and *La*

*Prensa* and others with a less intellectual and more cartoonish tone, such as the weekly *Caras y Caretas*, with names and inspiration coming from a publication in Montevideo, Uruguay from 1890. The latter published the first comic *Viruta y Chicharrón* (1912) in 1912 whose author was not disclosed; it was attributed either to the Spanish author Juan Sanuy – the pseudonym of Octavio Juan Bellver (1856 - 1908), or rather Manuel Redondo (1863 -1928). Alternatively, it could have been a copy of the United States cartoon *Spareribs and Gravy*, by George McManus (1884-1954). Later on, Redondo published the cartoons describing the life of a Spanish emigrant under the title *Goyo Sarrasqueta* (1913) with great success (DLLACS, n. d.).

There were also other less prominent publications that also published cartoons and drawings such as *Sucesos* magazine or *La Gaceta de Buenos Aires*.

In this mixture of more democratic political activity and the publication of cartoons, the appearances of politicians of the time as objects of mockery increased in cartoons, such as the cartoon related to the newly elected president, Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen (1852 - 1933).

In this environment, Cristiani, still underage, began to publish his illustrations in the magazine *Sucesos* and later in *La Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, where he attracted the attention of another Italian emigrant, Federico Valle (1880–1960) (Bendazzi, 2016).



**Fig. 1.** Font: *La Vida Moderna*, 271, June 19, 1912. Collaboration by Quirino Cristiani

#### 4. Cristiani's Work

Valle already had a long history in the nascent film industry, having trained in Italy as a camera operator and director, at the Société Lumière branch. He worked at the Parisian Urban Trading & Co., which in 1906 changed its name to Société Générale des Cinématographes Eclipse, and this work led him to travel mainly through Asia and the American continent.

The first aerial shot made from an airplane stands out from this period, when the American aviation pioneer Wilbur Wright (1867-1912) flew over the outskirts of Rome from Centocelle airport on April 24, 1909. The three-minute, twenty-eight-second short film was released under the title *Wilbur Wright und seine Flugmaschine* (Valley, 1909) (Wilbur Wright and his flying machine), the restored version of which can be viewed at Filmarchiv Austria. With his adventurous spirit he arrived in Argentina in 1910 to shoot images of the centenary commemoration of the nation's independence, settling permanently in this South American country in 1911.

Already on May 24, 1908, what was considered the country's first plot film *El Fusilamiento de Dorrego* (Gallo, 1908) was released in Buenos Aires and little by little the industry was beginning to establish itself. It was debated whether the film *La Revolución de Mayo* by the same director, which premiered on May 22, 1909, at the Ateneo theater, was released earlier and whether the dates were mistaken. In this open terrain for exploration, Valle would develop his film career, opening in 1914 a laboratory with the titles and posters of the films displayed in Spanish. Not staying there, he began to make short educational commercials with great success with the help of the Peruvian José Bustamante y Ballivián. One of Valle's most important productions was the newscasts that were shown before the movies. These so-called *Actualidades Valle*, were shown until 1930 and he produced a total of 657 short films. With the intention of giving these a different nuance and aesthetic, he communicated with Cristiani, proposing to make some cartoons, not animations, about the story. The shooting would be simple, conducted by placing the illustrator's hand under the camera while he was drawing. This technique was not new since it had previously been used in the United Kingdom, under the name of lightning sketch.

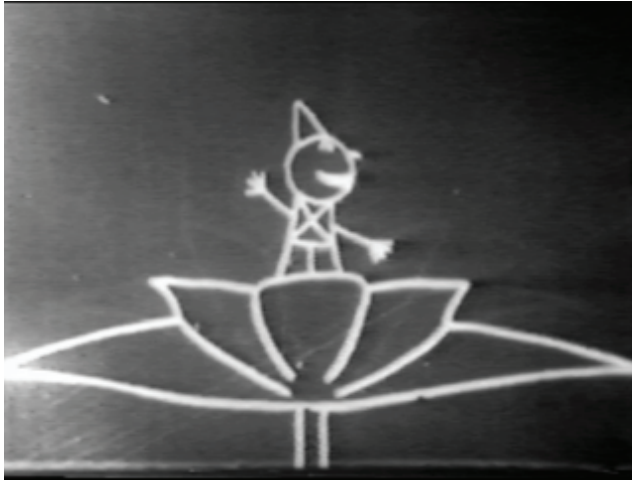
A few years earlier in Paris on August 17, 1908, a short film called *Fantasmagorie* (Cohl, 1908) by Émile Eugène Jean Louis Courtet (1857–1938), known by his stage name Émile Cohl, was released, using 700 double exposure designs. The less than two-minute play featured a man made of matchsticks who moved and encountered various objects that were modified.

Intrigued by the new technique and aiming to improve and give something different to his audience, Valle proposed to Cristiani to analyze the technique to be used in his newscasts. The new technique was broken down by the Pavia native, who began to experiment with it.

Faced with the work proposal, the young cartoonist presented him with a series of drawings to which Valle, as Cristiani himself recalled a long time later, told him:



“The drawing is very good. You will be successful. But cinema is movement, you have to move that!”. “And how is it done?” Replied the artist. “And? Study it!” Said the businessman (Quirino Cristiani, before Mickey Mouse, 2018).



**Fig. 2** Font: Fantasmagorie (1908) Émile Cohl

Cristiani studied the problem and solved it: he drew on cardboard that he later cut out and created mobile silhouettes, flat and articulated puppets. With this simple and laborious way of generating movements in the drawn figures, they began to produce short films.

Thus, on the roof of his house, in the open air, he began to work on what would be his first cinematographic work, *La intervención en la provincia de Buenos Aires* (Cristiani, 1916). Carrying this out was incredibly tedious.

He was located on the roof to be able to use the sunlight, since at that time there was no advanced lighting equipment, developing his own technique. This consisted of creating characters or objects on cardboard and then cutting them out. The figures were sewn at the joints which allowed their movement. They were placed under the focus of the camera and shot frame by frame making slight movements between them which created the sensation of movement. To carry out the movement of the cardboard, the director had to be kneeling or squatting and getting up to turn the camera handle. In addition, he had many conditions against him, the meteorological vicissitudes, change of lighting due to the earth's movement, winds, or rains.

The resulting short film showed the figure of the governor of the province of Buenos Aires between 1914-1917, Marcelino Ugarte (1855-1929) wearing his traditional top hat. You could see how he received hammer blows on the handle of which the word *Intervención* was read and how the hat was gradually swallowing it until it completely covered the controversial politician.

The short film was successful and caught the attention of Guillermo Franchini, a settled businessman, who owned the hotel which opened on December 1, 1908, *Sierras Hotel* in Alta Gracia, Córdoba province, where the most special guests stayed

and where the Spanish musician Manuel de Falla y Matheu (1876 - 1946) died; the hotel also had several cinemas and confectionery rooms. Franchini proposed to Valle to finance a new work of a political and satirical nature, but with greater footage. “During this time, Cristiani patented his invention under Number 15,498 of Argentine Patents in 1917 with a scope of 10 years as it appears in the National Registries of Patents and Trademarks” (Kartaczewicz, 2015).

The parties got to work and called their film *The Apostle*. Valle hired Alfonso de Laferrère (1893 - 1978), writer and politician, to work on the script. Quirino was also in charge of the direction. The French-Argentinian architect and set designer Andrés Ducaud was hired to create the models of the city of Buenos Aires, especially models of certain buildings, as well as José Bustamante y Ballivián, who had already collaborated with Valle on his short educational films.

Due to Franchini’s insistence, they also had the well-known illustrator Diógenes ‘El Mono’ Taborda (1890-1926), as a character designer. The ‘El Mono’ or monkey nickname was apparently given to him due to his physical appearance. His influence on the elaboration of vignettes was such that in Argentina and other areas of South America these illustrations were called *monos* or *pintamonos*. This time the filming took place inside the Valle Cinematographic Workshops, located at 452 Reconquista Street, in a more controlled and comfortable environment (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

De Laferrère began with the script in which Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen was lying on a cot. He was known for his sober and modest lifestyle – here he turned around without being able to sleep, worried about the moral decline in Argentina. After falling asleep, his spirit left his body, reaching the Olympus of the gods dressed as an apostle. With great fury, he communicated to the gods, with various examples, the chaotic situation of the country.

With the desire to change the situation Yrigoyen asked Jupiter to give him the ability to throw lightning at the corrupt. His wish was granted and by throwing them at the main buildings in the city he set the entire metropolitan capital on fire. The city had to be rebuilt from its ashes, becoming a new homeland. But of course, this was a dream. The sleeper woke up. It would be his job to create that new country.

Taborda for his part began to work on the character designs, which proved to be very complicated to animate, so that Cristiani redefined and simplified them for the animated technique with the author’s permission.

With the models of sixteen blocks designed by Ducaud, the sequences related to the Buenos Aires fire marked a narrative before and after in the incipient art, since this great representation was designed with all kinds of details to which photographic effects were added, so as to represent fire and flood of the capital, giving an unparalleled sense of reality.



**Fig. 3** Font: Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen by Diógenes “El Mono” Taborda.



**Fig. 4** Font: Model of Buenos Aires built by Andrés Ducaud.

The cinema where the film premiered, the Select-Suipacha owned by Franchini, determined the cost of admission of two pesos. The premiere of the film was a complete success; the critics and the Buenos Aires audience received it with great enthusiasm. Initially, the projection was part of the so-called unique program. This consisted of the projection of the main work and several pieces of lesser categories, which had to be replaced by the so-called cyclical program in which the same main work was screened several times without any other. It ran for six months, which was a milestone, even under current standards. “El Apóstol, an animated film using cardboard cut-outs said to be composed of 58,000 individually drawn frames and boasting a runtime of an hour and ten minutes, to glowing reviews” (Maher, 2020).

The film did not go beyond the capital city and was not shown in other areas of the country. However, the screening produced huge profits for Valle and Franchini, which would encourage them to continue with their film production. It was not like that for Cristiani, who only received a salary of a thousand pesos and an appearance in the credit titles in lowercase for a ten-month job of shooting 1,700 meters of film, with 58,000 animation positions for a production of sixty to seventy minutes.

The film was destroyed in a 1926 fire at Valle Studios. In this period, this film was made using nitrate negative, a highly flammable element. With a lot of humidity, it decomposes and with too much heat (temperature of more than 38 degrees Celsius), it can cause self-combustion.

Such was the problem with this material that the Health and Safety Executive, a British health organization, made a report to treat films, photos or other materials that used this system without risk.

“Ducaud continued his collaboration with the producer Federico Valle. In 1918, I directed *Abajo la careta* or *La República de Jauja* [...], a satiric feature film on the old conservative oligarchy.” (Bendazzi, 1996).

The Argentinian artist encountered another unexpected obstacle. On the one hand, Cristiani was not entirely satisfied with his collaboration with Valle – not only with his salary, but with the creative interference in the productive artistic process of *El Apóstol*. He needed to express himself freely.

On the other hand, the so-called Great War, also known as the First World War (1914-1918) was starting, not exclusively, on the European continent. This forced most of the countries to take sides indirectly. The so-called central powers were formed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, German Empire, Ottoman Empire and Kingdom of Bulgaria, and on the allied side there were Kingdom of Belgium and colonies, Kingdom of Serbia, French Third Republic and colonies, Russian Empire, British Empire and colonies, Kingdom of Italy with its colonies, United States of America, and Puerto Rico.

On July 28, 1914, hostilities began. In a quick reaction, the Argentine vice president Victorino de la Plaza y Palacios (1840-1919), who replaced the ill President Roque Sáenz Peña (1851 -1914) in office, declared Argentina neutral in the race on August 5 of that same year. Argentina had strategically remained neutral in the contest, owing to its new president Yrigoyen, who knew how to satisfy most of the citizens close to the allies and the military estates that embraced the position of the central presentations.

On April 4, 1917, there was an event that could have caused a loss of balance. The merchant ship *Monte Protegido* was attacked and sunk by a submarine of unknown origin off the Scilly Isles, also called the Scillonian Islands, located at the western end of the English Channel, and flagged by the United Kingdom.

The Argentine-flagged schooner had a Norwegian crew; Norway remained neutral in the great war. The schooner was carrying a cargo of flax bound for Rotterdam and was torpedoed by a German submarine. This fact provoked the fury of the Argentines who organized demonstrations and acted against German interests in the country. The Argentine government made a claim to the German government directed by the Argentine chancellor Honorio Pueyrredón to the Argentine minister in Berlin, Luis B. Molina, April 22, 1917, that read:

It is evidently contrary to the principles of International Law enshrined, to the neutrality strictly observed at all times by the Argentine Republic, and to the cordial relations between this country and that Empire. (...)

(...) the sinking of the Protected Mount (...) constitutes an offense to Argentine sovereignty, which puts the government of the Republic in the case of formulating the just protest and the claim of the consequent explanations. The Argentine government hopes that the German imperial government (...) will give it due satisfaction, repairing the flag, and agree to repair the material damage (...) (The sinking of the schooner *Monte Protegido*, 2021-04-04)

The German response was immediate and in a soft tone, basically conciliatory, giving clumsy excuses on April 28, 1917; the government of the last German Kaiser of William II (1859 – 1941) through the German Secretary of State Arthur Zimmermann (1864 – 1940) offered apologies and financial compensation for the injury. Several telegrams were subsequently discovered in the correspondence of Karl Ludwig Graf von Luxburg (1872–1956), who held the post of German Ambassador to Argentina, where there was a clear recognition of authorship.

In this volatile environment, Cristiani was approached by the president of the large shopping center Gath y Chaves, Della Valle and Fauvety, the *porteños* called it *gatichaves*, a well-known anti-German who proposed to make a film about the sinking of the ship. Cristiani, who had total creative control, called the film *Sin Dejar Rastros*, (Without a trace) (Cristiani, 1918), coming from one of the phrases that the German ambassador sent in his telegrams in which he encouraged the sinking *spurlos versenkt* (sunk without leaving trail). José Bayoni was hired as a scriptwriter.

The work was finished in mid-1918. Once it was done, it suffered a severe blow from censorship by the government, which did not want to stir consciences about the incident, seizing the copies and negatives of the film only one day after its premiere in the Select-Lavalle cinema. (Beckerman, 2012, p. 25).

That title does not say anything to today's viewers – comments Quirino Cristiani – but it was very clear to viewers back then. Everyone knew that the Earl of Luxburg had been the one with that idea of the sinking maneuver. He had given instructions by telegram to the German naval commanders. I wanted them to act perfectly hidden, “without leaving traces.” The textual phrase was ‘spurlos versenkt’, which was immediately translated, precisely, as ‘without leaving traces’ (to tell the truth, the phrase, more precisely, is translated as “sunk without a trace”, or “sunk without a trace”). In short, ‘without leaving a trace’ became a way of saying, almost a proverb. However, things did not take the right course: the sinking did not claim victims, and the survivors gave sufficient testimony to make it possible to conclude that, in fact, it was the Prussian Navy that had operated (Grupo6ilusroldan, 2018).

At the end of this film, the small Argentine animation industry began to develop with two feature films by Andrés Ducaud, the most prominent being *La Carmen Criolla* (Ducaud, 1918) made with puppets.

Quirino, who had already become commercially independent, founded a small studio on Calle Lavalle, before embarking on his next full-length project. It was his transitional period in a way. Thus, in the 1920s he made several animated short films, including *Los que ligan* (Cristiani, 1919), *Firpo-Dempsey* (Cristiani, 1923), *Firpo-Brennan* (Cristiani, 1923), *Uruguayos Forever* (Cristiani, 1924), *Humbertito de Garufa* (Cristiani, 1924), *Gastrotomía* (Cristiani, 1925) y *Rinoplastía* (Cristiani, 1925).

Likewise, he developed a kind of cinema on wheels in this period that consisted of a van fitted out on its back to project cinematographic images. Using this medium primarily for publicity purposes, he would later enhance it by showing comedy films of the time that were stockpiled by distributors and which he rented at a minimal price.

The success of this proposal generated traffic problems as people crowded the streets to see the images. The police had to intervene and prohibited him from doing so. But his restless spirit led him to propose to the owners of cinemas to put animated advertising in the intermission of the films. This was also a success until competition arose with the Emelco company.

In 1927, he was hired by Metro Goldwyn Mayer as the designer of the advertising posters for the new films that came to the country. During this period, he set up his studio in the garden of his house at Avenida Cabildo 1518, although he soon realized the need for more space by moving Estudios Cristiani to Calle Sarmiento 2121. During the development of the feature film *Peludópolis* (Cristiani, 1931) he returned to move his studio to José Evaristo Uriburu 460 (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

But the convulsed Argentina, politically speaking, was divided between supporters and opponents of Yrigoyen. When he was re-elected in 1928, he seemed to be dominated by his colleagues from the Radical Party, which led the Argentinian poet from Santander, Eduardo González Lanuza (1900 -1984) to write the text *Peludopolis* (González, 1928), or city of the hairy, alluded to the nickname that had been given to President Yrigoyen, the hairy, which would serve as the basis for the Cristiani's film.

Likewise, the disk recording system was used, where the dialogues were recorded and included some songs. He used the same technique similar to his previous works, but this time the aesthetic was much more like that of the comics he published, and people were used to seeing. (Grupo6ilusroldan, 2018).

“In 1929 Cristiani began to work on the idea of the film, which would change the script on several occasions reflecting political changes, always full of great symbolism” (Bendazzi, 2016, p. 191).

The original idea of the concept that Cristiani presented to the public in 1931 read like this:

The government ship sails through a rough sea full of sharks, there are also some pirates around whose leader, the furry one, assaults the ship, making its captain, the bald one, flee, name by which President Máximo Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear Pacheco (1868 - 1942) was popularly known, due to his baldness. He presided over the country from 1922 to 1928. Once at the helm, the pirates sail to an appealing island called the Quesolandina Republic. The filibusters settle there and have various adventures, until a paper boat approaches the coast on the horizon, with General José Félix Benito Uriburu (1868-1932) on board, together with Juan Pueblo (it is a generalist name that is used to designate the Argentine people), who begin to work immediately to restore order on the island (Bendazzi, 2018, p. 76).

It appreciated various symbolic references, such as calling the island Quesolandina, a term used in the Rio de la Plata to define the politicians who reached into the public coffers with the expression like cheese. Likewise, the name itself rhymes with the word Argentina.



Certain characters were also portrayed in an unflattering way. President Alvear appears lying on a deck chair in a bathing suit with a *galerita*, a top hat that was usually used by radicals from wealthy families. The one that later would become the minister of interior in the government of General Uriburu, Matías Guillermo Sánchez Sorondo (1880 - 1959) was portrayed in a haughty way. Major General Agustín Pedro Justo (1876-1943), future Argentine president between 1932 and 1938, with the nickname of *paracaidista*, was also portrayed. This name was used to refer to an opportunistic person with social ambitions. Other politicians of the time were also lampooned, with funny names like El Pelado Baibiene, Calafate Per'es el Colmo, O.K. Rina, Contra maestre Sancho and Tamborcito.



Fig. 5 Font Peludopolis (1931), Quirino Cristiani.

The 180-minute film premiered at the Renacimiento Cinema in September 1931. It was not certain whether it occurred on the 16th or the 18th. Authorities such as General Uriburu and his family were in the box (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

Before starting the film, a six-minute short film called *A visit to Cristiani Studios* was shown, which showed the process used, as well as the new sound synchronized with a musical band created by the Galician José Vázquez Vigo (1898- 1955). For



this purpose, the Vitaphone system was used, pioneered in Argentina by the SIDE (Sociedad Impresora de Discos electrophónicos).

In the first images of the film, we could read a poster of Cristiani to the public:

Impartial viewer:

You will not find in this view

Neither partisan preaching

Nor insults to this or that.

It is joyful, spiritual,

And if he catches the Dotor

It is without hatred or rancor.

Do not look at her with suspicion,

Tease the hairy guy

It's almost doing him a favor.

Peludópolis (Cristiani, 1931)

The reviews were excellent, recognizing the great work of the director. Even the president of the country praised the work saying: “great work of satire and a noteworthy acclamation of the Argentinean armed forces” (Bendazzi, 2018, p. 80).



Fig. 6 Font: Peludopolis (1931), Quirino Cristiani.

However, political life in Argentina was still very unstable, which meant that within a few months it had a new president of the government, Major General Agustín Pedro Justo. Because of this, the film ceased to be relevant. After the death of the former president Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen on July 3, 1933, Cristiani withdrew all copies of the film in circulation as a show of respect.

After these feature films, Cristiani continued working in advertising and in the field of distribution. His next most outstanding production would be *El Mono Relojero* (Cristiani, 1938), based on the text of the Uruguayan writer and editor Constancio Carlos Vigil (1876–1954) which premiered at the Monumental Cinema on February 10th, 1938. Vigil had the intention of doing more projects with Cristiani

such as *La hormiga viajera* and *La familia Conejola*, but for unknown reasons the collaboration did not continue.

In 1941 Walt E. Disney (1901-1966) traveled to South America on a mission of brotherhood promoted by the 32nd President of the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882 - 1945) to mitigate possible fascist and Nazi influences in the south of the continent, since the Second World War had broken out (1939 - 1945) in Europe.

During that trip, Disney offered Cristiani to work with him. This job proposal was rejected. "Working on what I want makes me immensely happy. This, and the freedom to be able to do it the way I like is something I would not change, not even for all the gold in the world" (Cristiani, 2014, p. 56).

Instead, Cristiani introduced him to the illustrator Florencio Molina Campos (1891 –1959), who would establish a great friendship with Disney and collaborate with him in various productions such as the animated film *Bambi* (Hand, 1942) where he was involved in the design of animals and trees on Victoria Island in Lake Nahuel Huapi, in Argentine Patagonia. He also collaborated in shorts and in the feature films *Saludos Amigos* (Ferguson et al, 1942), *The Three Caballeros* (Ferguson et al, 1945), *Fun and Fancy Free* (Luske et al, 1947) and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Geronimi et al, 1951).

Federico Valle's newsreel archive burned down in 1926, and the Laboratorios Cristiani burned down twice, in 1958 and 1961, so all Cristiani's film work was assumed to have been destroyed. However, Constancio C. Vigil, the author of the children's book on which *El Mono Relojero* was based, had kept his own copy of the film, and then miraculously, two short films, a satirical sketch from 1919 and a *Making-of Peludopolis* from 1931, were discovered during the production of the 2007 documentary (Rist, 2014, p. 194).

In 1961 the creator sold his studio and retired, receiving some mentions and even a life pension granted by General Jorge Rafael Videla Redondo (1925 –2013). Cristiani died in his sleep on August 2, 1984, in Bernal, Quilmes, Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

Analyzing the questions that guided this investigation, we can answer as follows:

- Who was Quirino Cristiani?

Cristiani was a researcher and animator who developed the cut-out technique that he patented, an animation film pioneer that directed several films that had been destroyed due to fire circumstances.

- What was Quirino Cristiani's contribution to the seventh art? What did it mean for the development of animated cinema?

Cristiani's contribution was essential for understanding the evolution of the animated film industry as his production procedures and methods are still in use

in the cut-out technique. He produced films that had the cult following during his time not only due to their animation quality but due to the film as a whole. His characteristic designs and themes make them invaluable to understand Argentina's history.

- What motivated his work?

During the conversation with his grandson, he confirmed that he was a free spirit and as such found a way of expressing his personal and political views in animation. His final goal was to keep the spectators aware of the Argentinean political circumstances with some quality cinematographic work.

- What elements influenced the course of his work?

Thus, I propose and develop the following key points:

- Ignorance of the animated technique
- Adaptation to the new environment
- Innovative work technique
- Production time
- Character of the author
- Production theme
- Geographical location of the work development and presentation
- Poor international distribution
- Original language of the work
- External influence
- Job material

### **5.1. Ignorance of the animated technique**

The study of movement initiated the development of the technology showing animations such as the zoetrope, thaumatrope, and the like, before the concept of cinema per se, as scientific developments at first and later as fairground entertainment.

Since its inception, cinema focused on real characterization, with very few studying or developing animated techniques. Cristiani himself had to study Émile Cohl's procedure intensively to understand the technique and reproduce it with his own ideas.

The great advantage that this technique had in this period was the interest in developing it by pioneers who understood the possibilities and its complexity.

The first viewers preferred to see real images rather than objects or animated characters in motion. Despite everything, animation was able to find a place in the hearts of the viewers.

### **5.2. Adaptation to the new environment**

The new medium implied a new narrative development, the need to learn from scratch, developing new ways of telling stories and understanding what the viewer was transmitting. For instance, the spectators of the first projections of the Lumière brothers left the rooms terrified when they saw a train approaching them.

In this period everything was learning; from the technique, the narrative, the creation of specialized spaces in the projection of the works, the constant changes in the advances, but especially one of the great problems was the geographical remoteness of the developers. In this way we find how different developments arose almost simultaneously in various parts of the world.

At that time the communications were not as fast and instantaneous as today and it was very difficult to know what the others were doing.

### **5.3. Novel working technique**

Each new development implies the need to learn not only the new language to be used but also to train professionals who can work in the new technique. Initially, the first directors and animators were illustrators, masters in their field, but not for the reason of knowing how to recreate the movement.

If we look at the first animations in history, we can see their elaborate work, but also their rudimentary movement on many occasions. In this sense, Cristiani's new technique, which did not require cartoon animation but clippings, ensured not only more autonomy but also the possibility of learning more quickly. This technique was also very conducive to solo work.

### **5.4. Production time**

The animated production process is much greater than that of a conventional film. At that time, making a movie with actors could take a couple of months at the most. In animation, it involved at least a year-long process, although Cristiani took only ten months with his first film.

The animated process is such that a stage cannot be developed if the previous step has not been completed, while in cinema one can do several tasks at the same time, divide teams, and shoot in parallel. For example, this can be seen in *Peludopolis*, which required script changes as the film evolved due to changes in Argentina's hectic political life.

### **5.5. Author's character**

Cristiani was a calm, bohemian man who, although he loved his art and work, had clear priorities. He was not obsessed with his job or income. The author understood from the beginning what it meant to be an inventor and what the English call an entrepreneur, a businessman, who did not stop until he achieved his goal no matter how much it cost.

He was an inventive man, as reflected in all the contributions he made not only to animated cinema, but also by inventing objects for everyday use, such as a system to prepare coffee with milk and heat it at the same time.

### **5.6. Production theme**

Obviously, the theme chosen for his feature films, although very popular among *porteños*, was not transferable to other areas of the country. Political issues in the capital city were not so interesting in rural areas, in a growing Argentina.

Perhaps if he had chosen other types of themes, he would have had more media exposure; simultaneously, there were not many cinemas at the time outside the capital where most of them were located.

### **5.7. Geographical location of the development and presentation of the work**

This comes to the fore in the previous section, since we not only have to talk about thematic or cinematographic development, but also about the fact that within the city of Buenos Aires itself there was a great rivalry between the owners of the cinemas. Distribution was not done like today where distribution companies can place the same title in different cinemas.

At that time, in most cases the exhibition centers were owned by magnates who sometimes acted as producers, with which the profit cycle for them was round to the detriment of an exhibition in the competition.

### **5.8. Poor International distribution**

As much as what Cristiani narrated was important for the period, this was not a topic of international interest. It was a very local and even partisan theme, although the author tried to be neutral.

### **5.9. Original language of the work**

The third film already had synchronized audio recording, but the first two films had text cards in Spanish. This fact also contributed to his work being forgotten. If Cristiani had been in an English-speaking country, its dissemination and study would have been much greater.

### **5.10. External influence**

Most of the films that came to be screened were foreign, which also made Cristiani prosper with his title laboratory, but certainly put pressure on the development of local cinema that had less means and was in tow of foreign developments, without disparaging the work of some local filmmakers who were trying to produce.

For example, *Peludopolis* caused the creator an enormous economic loss of more than twenty-five thousand pesos of the time. It was simpler and more profitable at that time to project foreign works with which a great economic benefit was achieved just by exhibiting them.

### **5.11. Job material**

The negative used at that time burned very easily, so the works that concern us were lost in different fires.

Finally, to conclude, we must honor the memory of an inventor, creator, artist, a man without limits who in his cinematographic environment left the history of a convulsive period in his country.

## 6. Conclusions

Connoisseurs of cinematographic technique know the great work involved in setting up a project, obtaining financing, executing and distributing it, expecting a positive reception from the public, which determines whether a film becomes triumphant or simply forgotten in time. If this occurs with an actor-led production, it is even more difficult to produce an animated film.

The animated technique is much more complex, the process is much slower and requires arduous training on the part of its participants. Naturally, they must be artists with a great knowledge of movement, proportions, and depth of field. An error in animation can take many hours to solve, while it is always easier to repeat a take due to a failed performance by an actor or a technical problem.

Animation is mistakenly associated almost exclusively with children, as we can see in Cristiani's own films or in other very popular ones, such as Walt E. Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) which were shown in the UK for people over sixteen.

The question posed by this paper relates to the understanding of how some works that have proven to be key to the history, not only of Argentine cinema but for the World, have not been recognized with the status they deserve. Cristiani's influence in the historical perspective of the Argentinian political world during his period allowed many researchers to go deeper and with a different perspective, even when his films were unfortunately destroyed. For example, his film *Sin Dejar Rastros* (1918) was important to show his fellow Argentinians the political situation during the Great War.

For some, his work is not recognized due to the imperialist process called *cultural colonization* and in the excessive love that many countries have for everything that comes from abroad; others believe that due to his political positions some powerful actors in our society *erased* him from history; and there are those who are sure that this oblivion is simply due to the fact that he himself decided to escape fame, secluding himself in a small town in the interior of the country.

Cristiani achieved several records in his life: he made the first animated feature film in the history of cinema (*The Apostle*, 1917), the first sound animated feature film in the world (*Peludópolis*, 1931), he was the author of the first censored animated film in the world (*Without leaving traces*, 1918) and the first Argentine film with optical sound (*The watchmaker monkey*, 1938).

He was a pioneer in animated film and inventor of a particular technique to animate cut-outs made by hand, giving them life in a unique way, and converting them into a moving image with an alternative method to that of celluloid that would be used years later. He was an autodidact with a bohemian education who learned to draw following his instinct and inspiration; one of his first jobs was as a street caricature artist: the challenge was to illustrate his client in less than a minute at the cost of a penny. Those who knew him said that he was a sensitive man, very committed to society, a true entrepreneur who came to have his own animation studio and created a cartoon school by correspondence with training and job opportunities.



This Argentinian artist was a pioneer of his time, an inventor and above all a freethinking man who brought a new technique and a new vision of filmmaking to the seventh art. Quirino Cristiani belonged to a generation of artists who dedicated their lives to art and ideals, committed men who gave everything for their innovative inventions and wanted to change the world through constant work and original ideas.



Fig. 7 Font: Flipmagazine, Interview with Quirino Cristiani.

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## CRISTIANI I PRVI ANIMIRANI DUGOMETRAŽNI FILMOVI U ISTORIJI - OD ARGENTINE DO SVETA

**Apstrakt.** Decembra 21-og 1937 godine, izasao je film *Snežana i sedam patuljaka* (Hand, Jackson, Pearce, Sharpsteen, Morey, Cottrell, 1937), u produkciji Voltera E. Diznija. Odmah su ga svi rangirali kao prvi animirani dugometražni film. Međutim, ova tvrdnja nije tačna. Italijansko-argentinski animator Kvirino Kristijani sa svojim delom *El Apostol* (Cristiani, 1917) dvadeset godina pre severnoameričkog, zaslužan je za prvi animirani igrani film u svetu. Njegov film *Peludopolis* (Cristiani, 1931) iz 1931 je takođe prvi animirani dugometražni film sa sinhronizovanim zvukom. S druge strane, Kristijano je patentirao novi i revolucionarni sistem za kreiranje animacija koristeći samo kartonske isečke. Nažalost, od nekih zaboravljen, a mnogima i nepoznat, kvalitativnim dokumentarnim istraživanjem namera je da se osvetli i afirmiše njegov rad analizirajući njegov doprinos sedmoj umetnosti, od Argentine do sveta.

**Ključne reči:** Argentina; crtani filmovi; animacija; istorijski filmovi; Quirino Cristiani

## **EFFECTS OF USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract.** *Paradoxes of using technology imply phenomena where the same option of a particular technological device both improves and undermines the well-being of people. In this paper, we deal with the present-absent paradox, which is related to the freed-enslaved paradox. The phenomenon of absent presence is examined in contemporary research through two constructs: technoference and phubbing. The general model of the effects of using information and communication technology on the relationships assumes that disrupting interactions leads to conflict; conflict lowers relational well-being, also lowering personal well-being. At the same time, the person becomes attached to the device, usually the telephone, and is “enslaved.” Specific models are also offered as part of the phubbing test. The paper also summarizes the results of empirical research on the two phenomena to illustrate specific, confirmed effects the use of ICT devices has on the relationship with others and personal well-being. Conscious use of technology could significantly reduce the repercussions, but this also seems a kind of paradox.*

**Key words:** *paradoxes of technology use, absent presence, technoferences, phubbing, interpersonal relationships, personal well-being*

Data from the Statistical Office show that over 80% of households in Serbia have access to the Internet; about 75% of households own computers, and about 95% of the population has a mobile phone (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). Generally speaking, the data show that 99.1 to 100 percent of people aged 16-24 and 25-54 have a mobile phone (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020), with the exception of some older adults. A mobile device, telephone or tablet, is the most common device for accessing the Internet. The Internet is mostly used to contact other people (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2019). These data are rather similar to those obtained in the USA, developed world countries, or European countries (Oberlo; Pew Research Center, 2021a, 2021b; Statista, 2021). Mass use of the Internet and mobile devices certainly has its good sides:

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relatively cheap audio-visual communication with people worldwide, paying bills and shopping from home, remote work and learning, and entertainment. However, the use of ICT devices and immersion in the digital space have introduced significant contradictions in people's perceptions and behaviors, which was first observed in the study of consumers (e.g., Mick & Fournier, 1998; Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005). Some of these issues are particularly significant from the standpoint of psychology and other sciences dealing with interpersonal relationships and communication and they will be presented in this paper.

## **1. Paradoxes of (information and communication) technology**

What is technology? The Cambridge Dictionary ([technology.cambridge.org](http://technology.cambridge.org)) defines technology, for the needs of the social studies, as the method for using scientific discoveries for practical purposes, especially in industry; for instance, there are e.g., computer or medical technology. The term "technology" actually includes both tangible and intangible things (e.g., laws; Mick & Fournier, 1998). In a narrower sense, technology can be understood as modern machines, artificial things: a) that require engineering knowledge for design and production; and b) that perform many operations independently (Benward, 1988; Mick & Fournier, 1998). At the end of the last century, it seemed that the social sciences did not have enough ways, that is, concepts, to deal with technology (Benward, 1988). Such a situation would not be acceptable, as social researchers are asked for advice on improving the modernization process or dealing with the problems caused by modernization. They are also expected to give visions of desirable directions for future development (Benward, 1988). Early 21<sup>st</sup> century saw a triple revolution, the effects of which were felt by societies at all stages of technological development (Rainie & Wellman, 2012; according to Chayko, 2019). It was about the unrelenting development of the Internet, mobile communications and social media networking. These are information and communication technologies (ICT) that enable interaction in the digital world, and the social sciences have been dealing with these issues in the last decades – we have not stood aside.

Today, it is clear that technology has both good and bad sides within the same aspect. These are the paradoxes of technology products, i.e., their uses. Before we were "possessed" by mobile ICT devices, research confirmed eight central paradoxes of using technology in general: Control / chaos, Freedom / enslavement, New / obsolete, Competence / incompetence, Efficiency / inefficiency, Fulfills / creates needs, Assimilation / isolation, Engaging / disengaging (Mick & Fournier, 1998). These "old" paradoxes are similar to the paradoxes specific to mobile technology use shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Paradoxes of using mobile technologies – hand-held devices that encompass hardware, software and communication, which includes Internet access, adapted according to Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005

Paradox	Description
Empowerment enslavement	/ Possibility of permanent communication related to work, family or friends, everywhere, empowers people, gives them freedom in communication. However, this same possibility of connecting prevents maintaining distance – 24/7 availability enslaves us.
Independence dependence	/ The phone "does everything"; it can perform actions that previously required several devices, giving users a sense of independence. However, getting used to all these options, and especially to the permanent internet connection, is, in the words of one respondent, "like having an electronic ankle chain" (Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005, p.12). Users become dependent on their device, i.e., on the options it offers. The researchers themselves say that this could be a separate case within the previous paradox.
Fulfills needs / creates needs	Fulfilling needs for, e.g., communication, by owning a nice and reliable device, facilitating errands has created new or exaggerated old needs. So, we "follow" and comment on people we do not know, we buy phones we can actually barely afford, we expect all information/services to be available online.
Competence incompetence	/ Many activities can be done via mobile devices, making the user feel intelligent and competent (e.g., use of electronic banking or navigation). However, if a person fails to do something (whether it is a bad design of or unfamiliarity with the application), they will feel incompetent. Incompetence can also result from the fact that the abundance of information offered by a mobile device interferes with focusing on the task the person is performing.
Planning improvisation	/ Mobile technologies can also be effective means of planning various activities, with a reminder of their schedule. However, this can lead users to put less effort into scheduling (e.g., forgetting the time it takes to get to a destination), ultimately ending in improvisation.
Engaging disengaging	/ Mobile technologies allow users to choose when to engage in conversation or events in the immediate environment, and when to disengage and move into the digital space. However, users often try to engage in parallel activities - to read messages from the phone during a call (to stay connected), which results in conversation interruption or discontinuation (disengaging occurs).
Public / private	Mobile devices should be personal means of private communication. However, it has become very common for people to have their private conversations in public places (with other people hearing them). Today, the public / private paradox is also strongly present in posting very personal content on social media profiles.
Illusion / disillusion	This last paradox was far more present in the earlier stages of mobile device development, when advertisements created unrealistic expectations - illusions, and users experienced disillusion in use. Mobile technologies have advanced, and users have become a little less naive regarding expectations, so this is a paradox that has been behind the times, for the most part.

Not all of these paradoxes have equally attracted the attention of psychologists. Most considerations and research are related to new ways of communicating and connecting with others, i.e., within the key paradoxes: 1) engaging/disengaging, which is related to the paradox of assimilation-isolation; and 2) freedom-enslavement,

with independence-dependence (according to David and Roberts, 2017). For the paradoxical state - to be in the company of others in the physical world and be completely absent at the same time, “absorbed by a technologically mediated world of elsewhere”, social psychologist Kenneth Gergen uses an illustrative term - absent presence (Gergen, 2002, p. 227). The increased possibility of communication has created a new state of “perpetual contact” with others (Katz & Aarhus, 2002) or a specific “always on” environment (Middleton, 2007<sup>3</sup>). Although this new reality should connect, empower and liberate people, the opposite often happens. All the above key paradoxes are brilliantly tackled in Sherry Turkle’s book “Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other?” (Turkle, 2011). The very phrase in the title – alone together – is often used to denote the first paradox: engaging-disengaging, or present-absent. From this short passage, one can already see the variety of terms, which describe essentially the same (paradoxical) situation our relationships with others are caught in as the result of the daily and almost perpetual use of technology. This paper will deal with contemporary psychological research, which investigates the described issues within two constructs: technoference and phubbing.

## **2. Use of ICT devices and relationships with others: technoference and phubbing**

In 2016, articles were published that presented two new constructs (and new measurement instruments) in researching the effects of using technology on relationships with others: technoference (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016a) and phubbing (Roberts & David, 2016). They will be presented in this order because the first term refers to all/any ICT devices, and the second is specifically related to the mobile phone.

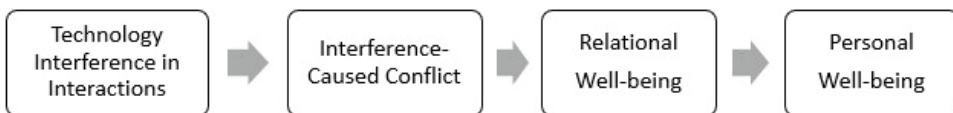
Brandon McDaniel and Sarah Coyne base their claims on the fact that using technology in the family everyday life has grown rapidly (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016a, b). Households have access to the Internet, family members own mobile phones, desktops or laptops and, most likely, have profiles on social network platforms (remember the statistics from the very beginning). So many devices and applications will inevitably cause interruptions in started interactions, less or more often. These authors refer to these interruptions as technoferences, and the phenomenon is first defined as “everyday intrusions or interruptions in couple interactions or time spent together that occur due to technology” (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; p. 85). Technoference can occur in any type of interpersonal relationship, not just couple

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<sup>3</sup> Middleton carried out a qualitative survey of BlackBerry users, which was also a great example of addiction; many users could not detach themselves from their devices, hence the term Crackberry (Middleton, 2007). In the same vein, there is a frequent quote from Edward Tufte’s interview “there are only two industries which refer to their customers as users, drugs and computers” (Computer Literacy Bookshops Interview, [https://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/complint\\_9497](https://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/complint_9497) Copyright © 1997, Computer Literacy Bookshops Inc.)



relationships. It can range from interrupting face-to-face conversations to feelings of “intrusion” or interference when a person decides to check their device while spending time with someone, even if no interaction took place at the moment (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016a). In fact, in the same year, the same authors published an article related to technoference in raising young children (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016b). As far as couples are concerned, it should be noted that there are positive effects of using technology on couple relationships. Technology allows couples to stay connected throughout the day and be available to each other in times of stress (Pettigrew, 2009; Dietmar, 2005; according to McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Research shows that technology-mediated relationship maintenance can lead to more intense commitment, satisfaction, and communication (according to McDaniel & Coyne, 2016a). It is also essential to understand that technoferences are not associated with the problematic use of ICT devices, such as excessive or addiction-like use; technoferences can occur in regular and problematic use. The reason why the phenomenon is significant and what triggers it is shown in Figure 1, followed by the explanation.



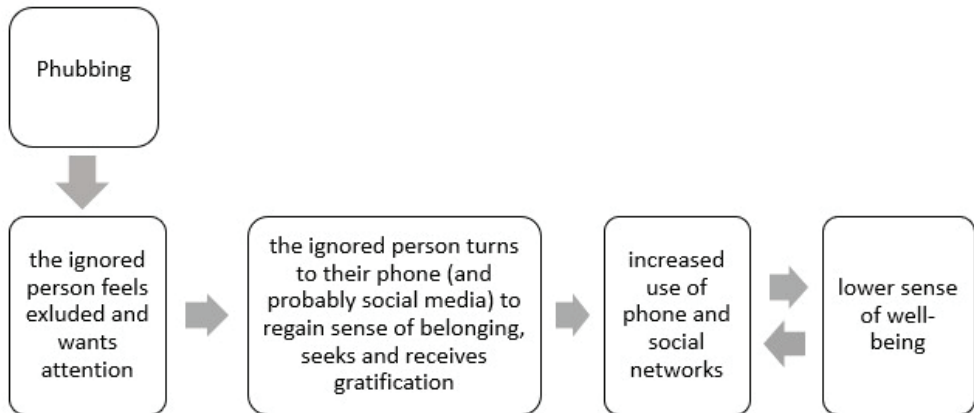
**Fig. 1** Conceptual model showing how technology interference in interactions can cause conflict, which then reflects on relational well-being and, ultimately, on personal well-being (adapted from McDaniel & Coyne, 2016a)

Imagine two people who are together – whether they are a couple, friends or family. We can even imagine that there is no interaction between them at that particular moment (for instance, sitting in the same room and watching TV to relax). ICT device notification is heard – it can be a message on the phone or computer, it does not have to be personal, maybe only the operating system needs an update. If one person immediately reacts to the notification and pays attention to it, the time spent together is “broken”, there is an intrusion – technoference. Technoferences increase the likelihood of conflict, especially about the use of technology, as the other person feels neglected or threatened – he or she is deprived of the attention paid to the ICT device. Conflicts are very likely to diminish relational well-being – one partner’s negative affect and irritability can easily trigger negativity in the other, especially if one partner feels misunderstood or underestimated in the interaction. Lower relational well-being results in lower personal well-being (the concept of well-being includes satisfaction with various aspects of life, including love, friendships, business and family liaisons). The explanation for this sequence of events is often found within the theory of social exchange (for the theory of social exchange, see e.g., Kenneth, 2011). Social exchange theory contends that social behavior results

from a process of exchange based on maximizing personal benefits and minimizing personal disadvantages. According to this model, a person weighs the rewards against the costs to select the most beneficial social relationships in which to engage. In the context of technoference, negative emotions that arise from the use of technology are perceived as an additional “cost” in a relationship, disrupting the profit to investment balance. Also, technology interference can be interpreted as a loss of rewards that a particular relationship was supposed to provide (e.g., loss of attention), which upsets the balance of social exchange and makes one partner feel dissatisfied. This is the conflict triggering mechanism. The outcome does not always have to be lower relational well-being or lower personal well-being – individuals can re-establish balance through agreement (e.g., muting/putting down the phone while going for a walk, eating and/or engaging in other activities important to partners). However, maintaining balance is not easy, especially in situations related to telephone use, and the sequence of events shown in Figure 1 often takes place.

Mobile phones are designed to be portable devices that can be used everywhere, and in our time, they seem to have turned into devices that *should* always be carried and used. Interaction interruption and depriving someone of attention due to the use of a mobile phone is called phubbing - from the words “phone” and “snubbing” (Roberts & David, 2016). Like technoference, phubbing does not have to be a literal interruption of conversation. It can be the ignoring that happens when we approach another person, but instead of communicating with us, that person (continues to) uses their phone. If we remember the paradox: a physically present person is obviously absent. The phone gives us the freedom to communicate at any time, find entertainment, do business from remote locations, and access information. However, this freedom comes at a price – being constantly connected began to mean being constantly available. People began to feel obliged to respond immediately to the phone notifications, afraid of missing out. Thus, with the telephone, we live the present-absent and freed-enslaved paradoxes in their full swing.

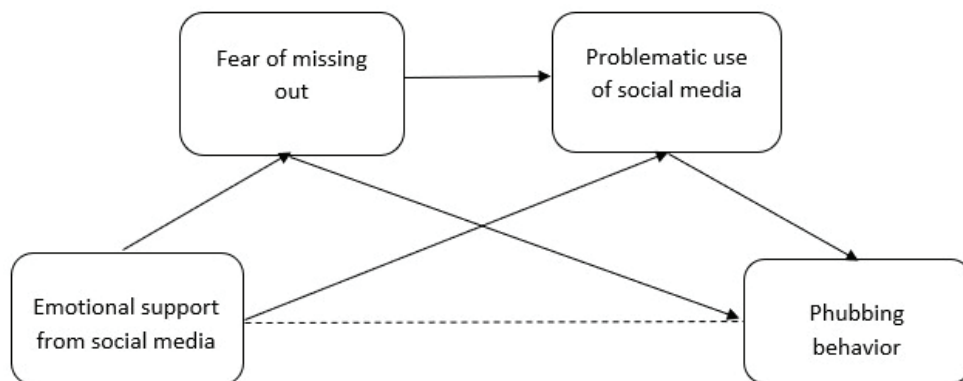
Phubbing, like technoference, was first examined in couple relationships. The conceptual model of effects is almost identical to that of technoference; the difference lies in the assumption that relational well-being lowers personal well-being and then leads to negative feelings, specifically depression (Roberts & David, 2016). This difference is not essential, because the feeling of personal well-being encompasses these concepts – both life satisfaction (general satisfaction and satisfaction with specific aspects) and experience of pleasant and unpleasant emotions (Diener, Suh & Oishi, 1997). Given this similarity, we will not present the general model here. The concept of phubbing also offers specific models that explain the origin and maintenance of this behavior from the aspect of the ignored person and from the aspect of the person who initiates ignoring (Figure 2 and Figure 3).



**Fig. 2** Phubbing from the aspect of the ignored person, as described by David & Roberts, 2017

What is particularly significant in Figure 2 is the feedback between increased phone use and decreased well-being. The model works even if the person does not use social networks – other (entertaining) contents the phone offers can provide comfort to the person, a kind of gratification, and thus make them use the phone even more. However, relying on digital content to receive social support/sense of belonging or competence leads to a reduced sense of personal well-being in the long run (“no one around me understands/appreciates me”). Then decreased well-being encourages (further) intensive use of digital content and creates a vicious circle.

What is one possible explanation for the reason why a person is engaged in phubbing, instead of giving undivided attention to the interlocutor? We start again from the rarely justified assumption that a person uses social networks intensively and is used to the emotional support received there (Figure 3). Support can also be gained by passively using network platforms – by scrolling through profiles that offer entertaining content, as in that way the person experiences (short-term) positive emotions. However, such “emotional injections” arouse the fear of missing out and lead to constant checking of social media – one falls into problematic use of social media. That is why in the company of another person, the “first” cannot but check their mobile phone or the notifications received – something very interesting may have just happened in the digital space. Emotional support from the digital space indirectly influences the occurrence of phubbing behavior, through the fear of missing out and problematic use of social media, as shown in Figure 3. These models clearly show the association between the present-absent and the freed-enslaved paradoxes.



**Fig. 3** Phubbing model from the perspective of the person initiating the process, assuming the intensive use of social media, according to Fang, Wang, Wen & Zhou, 2020

Finally, we will present a summary of the results of recent empirical studies dealing with technoference and phubbing, as an illustration of the specific effects of these phenomena on personal well-being.

### 3. Method

The analysis included articles published from 2016 to April 2021, from the EBSCO database accessed through KoBSON (Serbian Library Consortium for Coordinated Acquisition). The search was performed using the term technoference or phubbing, in the title, abstract or keywords of papers. The articles needed to be empirical studies in psychology. The analysis of the results of the paper was focused on the established correlates of technoference and phubbing, related to personal well-being in its broadest sense. The list of analyzed articles with a sample of subject can be found in the Appendix, Table 1.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Empirically proven effects of technoference

The analyzed articles comprise two studies that deal with the effects of technoference on the relationship: in one, the sample of subjects are only women living in a stable community (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016a), and in the other these were couples (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). Both studies gave similar results and showed the negative effects of technoference: conflict over technology use, lower relational well-being, more pronounced symptoms of depression, and lower personal well-being. On the one hand, it is possible to assume that lower relational well-being and depression make a person use technology more often to experience

positive emotions (feedback in Figure 2). However, in a study on couples (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019), which included interference via four devices – telephone, TV, computer and tablet, the authors concluded that telephone interference (actually phubbing) had more significant effects on mood, quality of interactions and relational well-being than the effects of feelings of depression, attachment anxiety and general relational relationship dissatisfaction. This allows us to conclude that the effect of using technology (specifically the telephone) exists independently of the current level of the couple's well-being. Three studies were related to the effects of technofence on adolescent well-being, which also assessed their parents' technofences (Stockdale, Coyne & Padilla-Walker, 2018; Qiao & Liu, 2020; Liu, Wu, Zhou & Wang, 2020). It may well be argued that most adolescents report that technology sometimes interferes with their interactions with parents. Still, minor, less frequent interruptions are a normative part of growing up in today's digital world. Such interruptions are unlikely to affect parent-child relationships or developmental outcomes (Stockdale et al., 2018). Therefore, when talking about negative effects, one should keep in mind the cases in which technofence is frequent. In these circumstances, adolescents perceive parental warmth as lower, which is associated with negative developmental outcomes, i.e., lower well-being: anxiety, depression, decreased prosocial behavior (Stockdale et al., 2018). Adolescents who perceive more technofence in relationships with their parents are also more likely to develop phone addiction (Qiao & Liu, 2020), which is certainly not a positive developmental outcome. This result was confirmed by the research of Liu et al. (2020). In fact, even in technofence research, it is clear that the "most dangerous" device is the phone. Two studies address technofence in parents of young children (Sundqvist, Heimann & Koch, 2020; Krogh et al., 2021<sup>4</sup>). Technofence, which has been examined through the use of digital media in general, is associated with internalized and externalized problems in children aged 4 and 5 years (Sundquist et al, 2020). It is interesting that the parents reported they perceived technofence every day, both because of their own and because of their child's use of digital media. Speaking of the latter, the World Health Organization recommends that children under the age of one not engage in the use of ICT devices at all (World Health Organization, 2019). However, in the research by Krgohova et al. (2021), it turned out that children up to 11 months of age still experienced screen time, though relatively short – between 6 and 17 minutes a day. In this research, it is also significant that the screen time and the frequency of situations in which the interaction with the child was interrupted because the mother paid attention to some of the ICT devices increased with child age (Krogh et al, 2021). Data from observational study suggest that during phone

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<sup>4</sup> Essentially, this includes third research, which has already been mentioned in the paper – McDaniel, & Coyne, 2016b, "Technology interference in the parenting of young children: Implications for mothers' perceptions of coparenting". However, the title, abstract and keywords do not mention technofence, but the phenomenon is referred to as "technology interference" (although a custom scale was used by the authors as a technofence measuring instrument). This study carried out on mothers showed that mothers who perceive more technology interference report lower parenting quality, lower relational well-being and have more pronounced symptoms of depression.

use, parents ignore children's interactional initiatives and convey lack of attention and care to the point of sometimes being inattentive to their safety and emotional needs (Elias et al., 2020).

#### **4.2. Empirically proven effects of phubbing**

Out of the 11 analyzed studies, six studies were carried out with adult subjects or on a sample of a large age range – from adolescence to late adulthood; additionally, in five studies the subjects were adolescents in middle or late adolescence (Appendix, Table 1). In studies that first researched phubbing as a separate phenomenon (rather than within technofence), the subjects were adults (Roberts & David, 2016; David & Roberts, 2017; there is no more accurate data on the subjects' age). The work by Roberts and Davids (2016) presents a partner phubbing measuring scale and its application. The initial assumption that interference caused by romantic partner's phubbing behavior increases the number of conflicts over phone use, and the conflict reduces relational well-being, was confirmed. Another study by the same authors (David & Roberts, 2017) tested the model shown in Figure 2. An ignored person feels excluded, and this feeling triggers the need for attention – the person turns to social networks, via their phone, to regain a sense of belonging. Once again, we will emphasize that it is especially important that the negative phubbing effects do not end with increased (excessive) use of social media, but continue to affect personal well-being, causing greater stress and increased depressive feelings. The research by Wang, Xie, Wang, Wang & Lei (2017) shows the validity of the general technofence process model (Figure 1) in the case of partner phubbing: negative effects on relational well-being were observed, which affected depression (the effects are probably more numerous, but one study may include a limited number of variables). Other studies show very similar results (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; David & Roberts, 2020). Only somewhat specific results were obtained in research carried out in Turkey (Ergün, Göksu & Sakız, 2019): being phubbed was associated negatively with loneliness and satisfaction with life. Other results are expected, i.e., in line with what we know so far about phubbing: it is positively correlated with anxiety, depression, experiencing negative self and somatization (Ergün, Göksu & Sakız, 2019). The likelihood that a person will be phubbed is increased by anxiety, negative self and hostility (Ergün, Göksu & Sakız, 2019). Two studies address the effects of perceived parental phubbing on adolescents (Liu et al., 2019; Xie & Xie, 2020). As assumed, parental phubbing significantly increases the likelihood of developing phone addiction in adolescents (Liu et al., 2019). Parental phubbing leads both to the perception of lower parental warmth and to poorer relatedness need satisfaction, and the end result is increased depressive affect (Xie & Xie, 2020). The mediator effect of self-esteem on the association between phubbing and depression was also confirmed in a sample of adolescents (Xie, Tang, Rapp, Tong & Wang, 2020). These results are very similar to the previously described results of technofence research. Another very interesting research is the observational study by Vanden Abeele et al. (2019), where subjects in the first part of the research were not aware of participating



in the research – of course, they found out later and gave their consent to participate. Observation of 100 ten-minute spontaneous dyad interactions revealed that phubbing occurred in 62 interactions, on several occasions (Vanden Abeele, Hendrickson, Pollman & Ling, 2019). Relatively few respondents accurately remembered their use of the phone during the interaction. It is also interesting that a partner's use of the phone in interaction is associated with lower intimacy of conversation, but personal use is not (Vanden Abeele et al., 2019). In the research by Fang et al. (2019), the model shown in Figure 3 (association of phubbing and social media) was tested and confirmed.

## 5. Conclusions

Although the daily use of technology has taught us that we will not always get the undivided attention of our interlocutor or the person with whom we spend time, there are still relationships where neglect is especially problematic. It is no coincidence that both technoference and phubbing were first examined in the context of couples, just as it is not surprising that partner neglect has negative effects. The same goes for the parent-child relationship – and this is a situation in which it is especially inappropriate to ignore the other because of ICT devices – to be present but absent-minded. As far as the constructs themselves are concerned, technoference includes phubbing, but phubbing alone is the most widespread phenomenon and new research seems to be turning more specifically to this behavior. It should be reiterated that occasional interruptions of interactions due to ICT devices are inevitable today, but these interruptions must not be a rule – to know how to *free* oneself from ICT devices and be *present* in interpersonal relationships. However, if technoference or phubbing behavior is pronounced, many negative outcomes can be expected in the domain of relational well-being, which further affects personal well-being as a whole. It is also essential to notice the vicious circle of dissatisfaction/negative feelings and excessive use of phones/social networks, i.e., other digital content. ICT devices can significantly improve our relationships with others (and indeed they do in many situations), but they can also disrupt these relationships, and thus our personal well-being. And Horace's eternal wisdom is true in the case of ICT use: there is a measure in all things.

How to deal with the paradoxes of using ICT devices? It can be said that this is also a paradox – the solution should be straightforward and under our control: make decisions/rules on use and respect them. However, situations turn out to be complicated and control is taken over by our ICT devices, most likely our phone. As Roberts and David jokingly note: “With their constant beeping, bells, vibrations and whistles, cell phones are like the petulant child who will not behave until he or she gets what they want. The desire of our cell phone is to be constantly attended to.” (2016: p. 139). Our desire to be present in interactions must overpower.

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## EFEKTI UPOTREBE SREDSTAVA INFORMACIONO-KOMUNIKACIONIH TEHNOLOGIJA NA ODNOS SA DRUGIMA I SUBJEKTIVNO BLAGOSTANJE

**Abstract.** *Paradoksi upotrebe tehnologije označavaju fenomene gde ista opcija određenog tehnološkog sredstva i poboljšava i potkopava blagostanje ljudi. U ovom radu bavimo se paradoksom prisutan-odsutan, koji je povezan sa paradoksom oslobođen-zarobljen. Fenomen odsutnog prisustva se u savremenim istraživanjima ispituje preko dva konstrukta: technoference i phubbing. Opšti model efekata upotrebe sredstava informaciono-komunikacionih tehnologija na odnos sa drugima pretpostavlja da ometanje interakcija dovodi do konflikta, konflikt snižava zadovoljstvo interpersonalnim odnosom, čime snižava i subjektivno blagostanje. Istovremeno, osoba se vezuje za sredstvo, najčešće telefon, i biva „zarobljena“. U okviru ispitivanja phubbing nude se i specifični modeli. U radu je prikazan i rezime rezultata empirijskih istraživanja dva pomenuta fenomena, kao ilustracija konkretnih, potvrđenih efekata koje upotreba sredstava IKT ima na odnos sa drugima i subjektivno blagostanje. Osveščena upotreba tehnologije bi mogla značajno redukovati negativne posledice, ali se čini da je i to svojevrsan paradoks.*

**Key words:** *paradoksi upotrebe tehnologije, odsutno prisustvo, technoference, phubbing, interpersonalni odnosi, subjektivno blagostanje*

## Appendix

Table 1: Articles used in the analysis, with a sample of participants

TECHNOFERENCE	Sample
Elias, N., Lemish, D., Dalyot, S., & Floegel, D. (2020). "Where are you?" An observational exploration of parental technofeference in public places in the US and Israel. <i>Journal of Children and Media, 1–13</i> . doi:10.1080/17482798.2020.1815228	Parents and children aged 2 to 6 years. US: 27 observations on two playgrounds (72 parents and 70 children); 30 observations at five eateries (98 parents and 90 children). Israel: 20 observations on four playgrounds (53 parents and 87 children); 38 observations at eateries (89 parents and 77 children).
Krogh, M.T., Egmoose, I., Stuart, A.C., Madsen, E.B., Haase, T.W., & Skovgaard Væver, M. (2021). A longitudinal examination of daily amounts of screen time and technofeference in infants aged 2–11 months and associations with maternal sociodemographic factors. <i>Infant Behavior and Development, 63</i> . doi: 10.1016/j.infbeh.2021.101543	Longitudinal study of mothers who were parents for the first time when the children were 2 months old (n = 1580), 4 months (n = 1383), 7 months (n = 1309) and 11 months (n = 1095).
Liu, Q., Wu, J., Zhou, Z., & Wang, W. (2020). Parental technofeference and smartphone addiction in Chinese adolescents: The mediating role of social sensitivity and loneliness. <i>Children and Youth Services Review, 118</i> . doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105434	3051 adolescent (mean age 13.08)
McDaniel, B. T., & Coyne, S. M. (2016a). "Technofeference": The interference of technology in couple relationships and implications for women's personal and relational well-being. <i>Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 5</i> (1), 85–98. doi: 10.1037/ppm0000065	143 married / cohabiting women
McDaniel, B. T. & Drouin, M. (2019). Daily technology interruptions and emotional and relational well-being. <i>Computers in Human Behavior, 99</i> , 1-8. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2019.04.027	173 couples (heterosexual couples, living together and having a child aged 5 years or younger)
McDaniel, B. T., & Radesky, J. S. (2018) Technofeference: Parent Distraction With Technology and Associations With Child Behavior Problems. <i>Child Development, 89</i> (1), 100-109. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12822	168 mothers and 165 fathers from 170 families, heterosexual couples, living together and having a child aged between 5 and 1 years)
Qiao, L., & Liu, Q. (2020). The Effect of Technofeference in Parent-child Relationships on Adolescent Smartphone Addiction: the Role of Cognitive Factors. <i>Children and Youth Services Review, 118</i> . doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105340	1345 high school students (mean age 16.1)
Stockdale, L. A., Coyne, S. M., & Padilla-Walker, L. M. (2018). Parent and Child Technofeference and socioemotional behavioral outcomes: A nationally representative study of 10- to 20-year-old adolescents. <i>Computers in Human Behavior, 88</i> , 219–226. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2018.06.034	1072 adolescents, aged 10 to 20 years
Sundqvist, A., Heimann, M., & Koch, F.-S. (2020). Relationship Between Family Technofeference and Behavior Problems in Children Aged 4–5 Years. <i>Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking 00</i> (00). doi:10.1089/cyber.2019.0512	153 parents (133 mothers, 19 fathers of children aged 4 and 5 years)
PHUBBING	
Chotpitayasunondh, V., & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Measuring phone snubbing behavior: Development and validation of the Generic Scale of Phubbing (GSP) and the Generic Scale of Being Phubbed (GSBP). <i>Computers in Human Behavior, 88</i> , 5–17. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2018.06.020	Study 1 - 352 participants, aged 18 to 61 years; Study 2 - 358 participants, aged 18 to 63 years
David, M. E., & Roberts, J. A. (2017). Phubbed and Alone: Phone Snubbing, Social Exclusion, and Attachment to Social Media. <i>Journal of the Association for Consumer Research, 2</i> (2), 155–163. doi:10.1086/690940	180 adults

David, M. E., & Roberts, J. A. (2020). Developing and Testing a Scale Designed to Measure Perceived Phubbing. <i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i> , 17(21), 8152. doi:10.3390/ijerph17218152	Study 1 - 250 participants, aged 18 to 25 years; Study 2 – 157 participants aged 18-71 years
Ergün, N., Gökşu, İ., & Sakız, H. (2019). Effects of Phubbing: Relationships With Psychodemographic Variables. <i>Psychological Reports</i> 0(0), 1–36. doi:10.1177/0033294119889581	(Study 1 - scale translation) Study 2 - 372 participants, aged 18 to 49 years
Fang, J., Wang, X., Wen, Z., & Zhou, J. (2020). Fear of Missing Out and Problematic Social Media Use as Mediators between Emotional Support from Social Media and Phubbing Behavior. <i>Addictive Behaviors</i> , 107, 106430. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106430	501 college students, aged 17 to 23 years
Liu, R.D., Wang, J., Gu D., Ding, Y., Oei, T. P., Hong, W., Zhen, R. & Li, Y. M. (2019). The Effect of Parental Phubbing on Teenager's Mobile Phone Dependency Behaviors: The Mediation Role of Subjective Norm and Dependency Intention. <i>Psychology Research and Behavior Management</i> , 12, 1059-1069. doi: 10.2147/PRBM.S224133	605 students, mean age 15.09
Roberts, J. A., & David, M. E. (2016). My life has become a major distraction from my cell phone: Partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction among romantic partners. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i> , 54, 134–141. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.07.058	(Study 1 – item development) Study 2 – 145 adults
Vanden Abeele, M. P., Hendrickson, A., Pollman, M. H., & Ling, R. (2019). Phubbing behavior in conversations and its relation to perceived conversation intimacy and distraction: An exploratory observation study. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i> 100, 35-47. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2019.06.004	200 students, mean age 20.49
Wang, X., Xie, X., Wang, Y., Wang, P., & Lei, L. (2017). Partner phubbing and depression among married Chinese adults: The roles of relationship satisfaction and relationship length. <i>Personality and Individual Differences</i> , 110, 12–17. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2017.01.014	243 married adults
Xie, X., Tang, X., Rapp, H., Tong, D., & Wang, P. (2020). Does forgiveness alleviate depression after being phubbed for emerging adults? The mediating role of self-esteem. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i> , 109, 106362. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2020.106362	955 students, mean age 19.51
Xie, X., & Xie, J. (2020). Parental phubbing accelerates depression in late childhood and adolescence: A two-path model. <i>Journal of Adolescence</i> , 78, 43-52. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.	Study 1 – 530 students (mean age 13.15); Study 2 – 293 students (mean age 12.87)



## THE COMMUNICATION STYLES IN THE DOMAIN OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS OR TO BE OR NOT TO BE ETHICAL<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The way of communication is one of the most important elements in an effective dialog in any democratic society. It includes a number of considerations and requirements. "Dialogue requires being taken out of the field of interest (...)". Usually, the pleasure of dialogue does not consist of reaching consensus, but of the constant and persistent enrichment" (Menyono & Dinimic 2000:15). Numerous studies explicitly state that the trust in a person involved in communication is often more important than the contents of what has been said. Insincere communication is associated with the manifestation of complex behavioral patterns in the process of interpersonal interaction, with the goal of prevailing in the communication process. The persuasion principle is one of the major tools in establishing the way of communication in the sphere of public affairs. But, the key to democratic and sincere communication is the ethical approach to a dialog in the first place. In the mosaic of communication, in the domain of public affairs, we will focus on the persuasive style of communication, ethical and non-ethical behavior of parties in the process of communicating, adopting the interdisciplinary character of analysis. "Embracing this kind of guideline deters us from imposing our ways and our values on others, whose experience and views of appropriate communication may differ from our own" (Wood, 2006: 40).*

**Key words:** *communication, public affairs, persuasion, style, ethics, non-ethical, dialog*

### 1. Introduction

Despite the fact that we are communicating continuously, we are not always effective. Communication is an everlasting process, especially in the sphere of public affairs. Even when we do not communicate with people, we interact with mass media and communication technologies. We perceive each other by the verbal, non-verbal and written communication styles, as the central magnifying energy of human personal, professional and civic prosperities.

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Communication permeates life in all segments and it is the only way of establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships in any democratic society. “Communication in the domain of public affairs and business is a complex, socio-psychological process in which people exchange information and it is carried out in writing (by exchanging documents of different types, nature and purpose, or written materials) or oral communications (through various channels), that need a response (feedback)” (Borisova, 2017: 11).

Communication requires the existence of, at least, two participants in the communicative act: the one who sends and the one who receives the message and the two, generally, try to reach an understanding and eventually agree on some issue. In order to reach an agreement (after the recipient decodes the message), the symbols that are exchanged during the communication need to be identical (or, at least, close enough) in their meaning. It is not, we all will agree, an easy task. The transmission of information is successful when the effectively sent message touches thoughts and ideas of the other side in communication. On the other hand, communication is unsuccessfully done when the process is disrupted and obstacles are created that stand in the way of a set of established goals. The major purpose of communication is to deliver the message to others clearly and unambiguously. In that process, honesty, as the major principle of ethical behavior, should be the leading principle. “In order to be able to communicate successfully with other people, one must be in a friendly mood, respond without accusations, show open interest in the views of the interlocutor and reduce resistance, and most of all, contribute to building trust” (Deletić & Pejičić, 2008: 33).

## **2. Communication styles and transmission of messages**

Communication skills are vital to the health of our society, argues Wood:

“To be effective, a citizen in a democracy must be able to express ideas and evaluate the ethical and logical strength of the claims and reasoning of public figures. To make informal judgments, voters, for example, need to listen critically to arguments of the candidates and responses to questions. We also need to listen critically to the proposals about goals for our communities, for the institutions at which we work, and for the organizations on which we depend on for services.... Healthy civic and social management depends on our ability to listen thoughtfully to a range of perspectives and styles of communicating and to adapt our communication to diverse people and contexts” (Wood, 2006: 11).

Language is the main means by which agreements are reached in communication activities, as well as people’s consent to certain issues. Accuracy is the leading force, either in oral or written communications.

Oral communication is the most developed way of transmitting messages. This is the most significant achievement of the development process and the initiator of all changes and further development in the public affairs environment. The advantages of verbal communication are: brief exchange of ideas, immediate response, clarity...

Face-to-face communication is still the most reliable way of conveying information and getting feedback. Personal communication is based on the meaning of words and sentences, the intelligibility of speech, the clarity of the logical flow of thought, the intensity of the voice, proof and condition for any further development.

On the other hand, the advantage of written communication is in a written trace of communication. If there is any doubt about the contents, the message is available for the review. The written messages are usually well organized, logical and clear. The main disadvantage of written communication is the time required by this form of information exchange, the lack of feedback, non-verbal signs that consist of body movements, intonation and accentuation of individual words, facial expression and physical distance between the sender and the recipient of the message. Through non-verbal communication we can express our mental and emotional states. The two most important messages conveyed by body language are: how much we like someone, or how much we are interested in his or her ideas, attitudes and the level of relationship between the sender and the recipient.

In the process of communication, participants encounter many factors that make communication difficult and unsuccessful. Some are related to the subjects of communication, to the climate of communication or even the lack of appropriate means of communication, stereotypical prejudices... Communication processes are also susceptible to noise, harassment and interference in the process of transmission.

The style of any verbal or written saying, as part of speech called elocution, is very important in the process of communication. "The right word at the right place", as Jonathan Swift said once. In relation to style in written communication, "oral style is more direct, personal, and uses visual and audio aids, less formal, more related to our emotions than intellect. The style of oral communication has to be as simple as possible, well organized, and clear, yet, conceivable and comprehensible." (Avramović, 2008: 265). The communication style is an individual, stable form of communicative behavior which manifests itself in different conditions of interaction. "How important is the personal stamp in the communication can be seen in the case of British Prime minister W.C. who would arrange the order of historical facts in his own style to avoid gray reality and stress the importance of his original way of thinking" (Cvetanović, 2012: 86).

Desev defines style as "a set of characteristic, typical qualities, techniques, manners, forms and methods of action, which are manifested directly in the way of human behavior" (Desev, 1999: 554). Each style, as the means of using different language tools in the communication process, is well presented in the field of functional stylistics. The style of communication in the area of public affairs, for example, should be well organized as administrative, official, precise and fully bound by linguistic norms.

Speech decorations, thought figures, construction or discourse are related to the ideas or attitudes, with the same goals to convince the party in communication more effectively and emphasize their own attitudes or diminish the statement value of the opposing party. However, the goal has always been to have the desired impression, to prepare the recipient in conversation for easier acceptance of the presented ideas. (Radović, Cvetanović & Boykov, 2018: 104).

American psychologist and philosopher Willie James established his major scientific work on overcoming the boundaries between people participating in conversation. The great example is the research of Ballenger, (Stanojlić & Gaković 2008: 20) who stresses specific styles in the communication process characterized by the lack of mutual trust and honesty among the interlocutors: 1. *Delusion* (we are talking about trips that are not taken; about acquaintances that do not exist at all ...). 2. *Transformation* – trying to convince the others of the truth, and we ourselves know that this is not true. 3. *Concealment* (intentional mitigation, shortening, silence). 4. *Ambiguity* – hypocrisy and ambiguity. 5. *Insinuation* – deception. 6. *Calculation* is characterized by cunning, flattery, deception with illusions. 7. *Inappropriate criticism* – protection and fraud due to their own noninvolvement. 8. *Intellectualization* – reserved, calculated and seemingly calm behavior without the emotional contribution. 9. *Escape* – a state of escape in which the speaker bypasses, avoids or hides questions or twists the answers. 10. *Unnatural politeness* – diversion with the intention to win the respect and love of others in the name of some immediate interest. (Politeness becomes intrusive, expressive, and suspicious, when it goes beyond conventional frameworks. Such politeness arouses suspicion).

Virginia Satyr (Boyanov & Bojkov, 2020: 251) distinguishes four styles of communication: passive, aggressive (distracted), passive-aggressive and assertive. Only the assertive type is the preferred one in the domain of public affairs.

The main feature of the passive style is to avoid hurting other people at all costs. Passive persons do not express their needs, opinions and feelings. Such persons keep everything to themselves so the others do not acknowledge their intentions the right way. They speak quietly, or talk a lot, but saying little, and usually avoid eye contact. The advantage of this style is that people rarely get angry with the speaker.

The main characteristic of the aggressive style of communication is the domination over others: criticize, humiliate or transfer their responsibility to others. The advantage of this style is that such people often get what they want. On the other hand, the interlocutors feel pressure and discomfort.

The passive-aggressive style is a combination of both passive and aggressive style. The main feature of this style is that passively aggressive persons do not express their desires, opinions and feelings. They act politely, but do not follow the agreement and do not accept personal responsibility.

Being assertive means expressing all desires, opinions and feelings honestly and clearly, while empathetically respecting the desires, opinions and feelings of others. This type of style is considered to be the most effective way of communication. Persons who use this style speak in a calm tone, equate the verbal with the non-verbal communication, listen to the interlocutor and do not interrupt. They use the most effective way of getting an agreement. (Radović, Cvetanović & Boykov, 2018:104).

### 3. The mechanisms of manipulation

The problem of manipulation in the sphere of public matters is among the major ones. Philip Breton in his outstanding book, *La parole manipulée (Manipulated Word)*, writes about the conditions that lead to manipulation in the sphere of public affairs: weak management in cultural and educational systems, media and political sensations, populism in all segments of public life, corruption, production of inner and external enemies, and the lack of trust in institutions and other. His concern is that people are not aware of the strength of manipulation. He is very disturbed by the fact that people of present democratic societies have a common belief that they have the ability to easily decode manipulation. For many of them the mass media should be the decoder of false motives of those who have the intention to manipulate. However, he insists that media has one of the leading roles in implementation of manipulation, and it is the reason why he strongly alludes to people to be much more aware of this problem because the mechanisms of manipulation exist in every spore of public affairs. (Breton, 2000: 22).

“The act of manipulation is to enter into the soul without them being aware of its persistence” (Breton, 2000: 25). According to Breton, in today’s world, a new kind of sophisticated approach has been created, partly due to the new communication technologies. The new powerful tools of that new method of persuasion are propaganda and disinformation. In fact, manipulation is the process of communication, but not through discussion or dialog, but the constraint or seduction by the demagogic approach, repetitions, the fear of authority, even the seduction by certain style. All of this leads towards conformism as the collective hypnotic state of people’s minds. Breton is very aware, first of all, that we do not have the mechanisms to easily decode those manipulative methods. It looks like, he argues, that the language of persuasion develops outside our culture, and outside the educational system. On the other hand, there is the tendency in science to encourage thoughts about language as a way of manipulation. Those who use persuasive style in communication should certainly be responsible for the way of adopting those ideas. How to fight manipulation? “The fight”, he says, “against manipulation should start, at first, with learning how to decode manipulative expressions we are exposed to. In that direction, we should try hard to better understand the mechanisms of communication in general, why we are involved in certain communication and on what base we build our decisions” (Breton, 2000: 180). But the first step, according to Breton, should be to see our own manipulative intentions, even if we do it unintentionally. For that reason, self-examination can lead toward an open negation of messages with manipulative content. And finally, it is important to implement the methods of correct reasoning through analogy, testimony, narrative, and cause so that the parties in the process of communication can decide together whether the evidence really support the claim.

#### **4. Persuasive way of communication**

After an oppressive regime was overthrown in ancient Greece, the democratic society was established. The new way of life established the new way of communication in the sphere of public affairs. In order to bring legal claims against the overthrown government, the citizens needed to learn to speak effectively and persuasively. Cxorax and Tissues were the first teachers of the persuasive speaking style. However, sophists were unconcerned with the ethics and the search for the truth. They were assuring people that in a short time they can be taught how to win arguments by using special techniques. Ethics for them did not have any role. Their only goal was to teach people how to win by any means available. They left almost no trace of any scholarship, but even today, there is the name for deceptive reasoning in argumentation well known as sophistic reasoning.

Persuasion is the process of motivating someone, through communication, to change a particular belief, attitude or behavior (Rodman, 1997: 324). According to The Oxford Dictionary, persuasion is the action or process of persuading someone or of being persuaded to do or believe something. However, false or misleading information shouldn't exist in searching in the favor of the audience or change of attitude or behavior in the way that is of our selfish interest (Frank, 1983: 97). Being wrong on moral grounds, the credibility of the persuasion style will suffer on a long range. Frank states several elements of unethical persuasion: dishonesty as deliberate lying, withholding information, statistical manipulation, pandering, inaccuracy as ignorant misstatement, reporting opinion or rumors as truth or strategies that are not in the interest of another party in communication. Most importantly, one unethical act can cast doubt on future truthful statements. For all the reasons, honesty has been the best policy in any form of communication. A very good example is the article published in the New York Time magazine in 1987 that shows Biden plagiarizing parts of an English politician's speech; as a result, he had to drop out of the race for Democratic Presidential Nomination. Ironically, 35 years later, he was elected president. It shows that voters have short electoral memories and the lack of moral grounds of politicians in general.

There are many theories, started with Aristotle, on the issue of persuasion. However, there are three theories that, according to Rodman, have attracted a significant bulk of research in that direction. The basic idea of the balance theory is that people like to feel psychological consistency. In other words, they like to feel that their ideas about themselves are in a balanced and consistent state. On the other hand, the social judgment theory can be best seen during the months of a political campaign when candidates carefully watch the opinion polls, adjusting their appeals to the attitudes of acceptance. Inoculation theory deals with the audience's resistance to subsequent persuasion, which means that the other side of communication is presented with the arguments of opposing points of view. That way, even the more intelligent opposing party is persuaded much better through two-sided arguments. The objective in persuasive communication is to move the other side to a specific and attainable behavior (Rodman, 1997:352).



## **5. Ethical standards as the major determining goals in communication**

The ethical standards should be the major determining goal of every communication. Along with being able to articulate this standard as the honest one, well supported arguments should also be a matter of respect to the parties in communication processes. As Quintilian, a Roman expert in Rhetoric argued, any of the participants in communication must meet the Roman Republic's definition of a virtuous man. That virtuous man or a good man who only has the right to be included in rhetoric matters, as Plato alluded to, can be labeled with the initial, the derived and the terminal credibility.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains that the field of ethics or moral philosophy systematizes, defends and recommends concepts of right and wrong behavior. In a more precise way, it includes values such as loyalty, integrity, honesty, respect, and good communication. However, the history of human communication supports the trend of unethical behavior, especially in the domain of policy making, journalists' approach to the truth and unethical doing of public representatives. The cornerstone of the problem in general is the unethical reputation of modern day's communication. Officially, the code of ethics exists in the majority of professional associations, such as human rights, fairness, the freedom of speech and dignity. Plato wrote that good people do not need laws to act responsibly while, on the other hand, bad people will find a way around the laws.

Our essential question is to discover the reason for that kind of situation in present day's communication... Unfortunately, there are many. One of the major reasons is that this important branch of human communication is not on the list of priorities in the secondary or higher level of education. According to the research conducted by the International Association of Business Communication Research Foundation<sup>3</sup> in the field of ethics, the majority of participants in the area of public relations had a few, if any, academic study of ethics. The Commission on Public Relations Education, a group of experts who, from time to time, examine the knowledge of ethics among public relations employers, advised colleges and universities to include more dedicated courses of ethics in their curriculums. They also strongly argued that education in public relations can provide a body of knowledge about the process of ethical decision-making that can help students not only to recognize ethical dilemmas, but to use appropriate critical thinking skills to help resolve those dilemmas in a way, resulting in an ethical outcome. Also, the Commission noted the need to raise the importance of particular issues and trends in the public relations field such as ethics and transparency. Their major concern is that young practitioners, unprepared to deal with ethics, would harm their careers and, even more importantly, reduce the reputation of the public relations profession itself. Adopting the ethical principles discourages parties in communication processes from deceiving others by distorting evidence or withholding information. One of the most

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.commpred.org./report/>

important principles for ethical communication, as well, is respecting differences between people. Embracing this guideline deters us from imposing our ways and/or values on others, whose experiences and views of appropriate communication may differ from our own (Wood, 2006: 40).

Morale is on a very low level in all aspects of public life and one of the most important reasons is that the matter of ethics is very complex and difficult to apprehend (Jensen, 1990: 281). He argues that when discussing terms of ethical or unethical, there is oversimplification in approach and that it is more helpful to think in terms of a continuum rather than limiting it by black and white simplicity.

Politicians, who have the ruling role in public affairs, usually do not bring bad news to the voters, because if they did, they would be afraid of being beaten politically. "They believe that the voters do not want to hear about the cost and inconvenience of solutions to social problems" (Rodman, 1997: 55). On the other side of the line, opposite of politicians with usually ethical problems stand, for example, public relations firms, which usually twist the truth to serve specific interests of business organizations (Finn, 1993: 40).

Changes in communication technology have transformed the nature of the way of communication. To be able to avoid unethical, manipulative and dishonest behavior, the most important communication skill is critical thinking, using logic and reasoning, recognizing valid argumentation, and at the end, distinguishing discussion from manipulation.

## **6. Dialogical ethics versus persuasive ethics**

Dialog should be the natural inclusion in any of the communication processes. Discussion is the only democratic way to underline the truth to which the parties can agree on. The persuasiveness and the advocacy, as the stylistic approaches, can be implanted only in the form of dialogical communication. Scholars, like Kent and Taylor, see dialog as the only way of communication and "if one partner subverts the dialogic process through manipulation, disconfirmation, or exclusion, then the end result will not be dialogic" (Kent & Taylor, 2002: 24). Further, Tilley argues that dialog is the best way in resolving ethical dilemmas through a mutual understanding of the truth (Tilley, 2005: 317). Ethical standards as part of campaign measurements should also be highly encouraged. Ethical principles should be strengthened by incorporating deontological philosophy into a dialogical way of communication. Deontology, as the study of duty based on Immanuel Kant's philosophy, can be unified with ethical principles only if there are positive motives on both sides in reaching any decisions.

The ability for all sides to be engaged in ethical reasoning is the only democratic, responsible, and important way of communication in the modern era of public affairs. In that matter, academic institutions and professional practice should be involved even more extensively in the matters of ethics. The crisis of trust has reached the top of the list among all crises in modern day's communication. The

obligation of all sides in the process of communication in the field of public affairs should be the priority among all. Approaching this urgent problem will definitely define the role of political and public relations organizations in the near future.

As Ljubomir Tadić elaborates at the end of his book *Rhetoric* (Tadić, 1995: 329), there is no better way of keeping democracy waken than critical wakening, or opening some kind of permanent Agora that will nurture rhetoric argumentation in contrast to the eristic model. Democracy has its roots in critically nourished public opinion.

## 7. Conclusion

In any of the particular communication processes, there must exist the balance and the commitment in giving and receiving messages as the essence of a meaningful relationship. Non-compliance or avoidance of settlement leads to accumulation of obligations, on one hand, and instability on the other, which can lead to relations termination.

The key to success in any professional communication, particularly in the domain of public affairs, should be a sincere relationship. However, in this so-called crossword puzzle commitment, there are often many unknowns, but the leading one is insincere communication when one side, for example, hides or manipulates, while the other side is completely unaware of that.

Practice shows that the atmosphere of comfort and mutual understanding in professional communication is crucial in maintaining the responsible and ethical balance. Successful communication depends on many elements, but the essential one is the ability to navigate the speech situation, select appropriate language tools for the relevant field of communication (Mitseva, 2011: 88-89).

Resolving the conflicts and clarifying the goals can be achieved through compromise (understanding), acceptance (open conversation, communication without confrontation) and partnership (forgiveness, honesty).

Finally, there are many clouds in maintaining fair, honest and ethical communication in the domain of public affairs. To be able to avoid the so-called empty talks or declamation, as Ljubomir Tadić wrote (Tadić, 1995: 328), there are no better ways than being fair and honest in communication.

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## STILOVI KOMUNIKACIJE U OBLASTI JAVNIH POSLOVA ILI BITI ILI NE BITI ETIČAN

**Apstrakt.** Način komunikacije je jedan od najvažnijih elemenata efikasnog dijaloga u svakom demokratskom društvu koji uključuje niz razmatranja i zahteva. Posebno mesto u lancu komunikacije u oblasti javnih poslova zauzimaju stilovi i veštine u dijalogu. „Obično se zadovoljstvo dijaloga ne sastoji u postizanju konsenzusa, već u stalnom i upornom bogaćenju (Menyono, 2000: 15). Brojne studije eksplicitno navode da je poverenje u osobu koja se bavi komunikacijom često važnije od sadržaja izrečenog. Neiskrena komunikacija je povezana sa ispoljavanjem složenih obrazaca ponašanja u procesu međuljudske interakcije, sa ciljem da preovlada u procesu komunikacije. Principi ubeđivanja su jedno od glavnih oruđa u uspostavljanju načina komunikacije u sferi javnih poslova. Ali, ključ demokratske i iskrene komunikacije je etički pristup

*dijalogu na prvom mestu. U mozaiku komunikacije u domenu javnih poslova focus je na stil nagovaranja, etičko i neetičko ponašanje stranaka u procesu komuniciranja, uz primenu interdisciplinarnе analize. „Prihvatanje ove vrste smernica nas odvraća od nametanja naših načina i vrednosti drugima, čije se iskustvo i pogledi na odgovarajuću komunikaciju mogu razlikovati od naših sopstvenih”. (Wood, 2006: 40).*

**Ključne reči:** komunikacija, javni poslovi, ubedjivanje, stil, etika, dijalog





## META-REFERENTIAL REALITY IN THE ABYSS OF MEDIA IMAGES AND THEORIES<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** McLuhan's statement "the medium is the message", made at the time of the expansion of television in the 1960s, was confirmed by the advent of the Internet, social media platforms and the digital transformation of modern society. The media form encircles the recipients, becoming an environment more real than reality, much like Baudrillard's simulacrum. "Immersed" in a media kaleidoscope in which "pictures within a picture" are endlessly multiplied, users find it increasingly difficult to distinguish facts from interpretations, facts from factoids, lost like "Alice in Wonderland" in the virtual space of never-ending stories. Technological progress has preserved all the old media, while producing new ones, in a way similar to the Russian "matryoshka dolls", but has pushed the truth and moral dilemmas into the background. Entertainment has become the main media content, information is delivered in the "infotainment" form, with the rapid succession of images as a popularized "montage of attractions". Marx's fascination with machines and productive forces as grounds of a "social existence that determines men's consciousness" has undergone an unusual inversion: the media production represents and creates a worldview in a much more sophisticated way than heavy industry, which as a relic of the past becomes an ecological threat to humanity and the planet. "Reality", the one word that, at the insistence of writer Nabokov, should always appear in quotation marks, is an astonishing artifact of the media and their powerful masters, and the Earth itself has been utilized as Duchamp's "readymade", thus becoming an artwork subjected to relentless exploitation for profit. Mastering Manovich's "language of new media" is necessary for understanding modern information and visual culture, in order to make communication between people possible at all, because the contemporary culture is meta-referential and self-centered. A critical understanding of the world, which requires media literacy and continuous media education, is the only way to avoid complicity in the collapse of reality under the weight of media images that erase the boundaries between reality and fiction, facts and theoretical interpretations.

**Key words:** meta-referential reality, media, message, media image, theory

### 1. Introduction

In the mid-1960s, Canadian media theorist with a PhD degree in medieval literature Marshall McLuhan, in his book "Understanding Media: The Extensions of

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Man”<sup>3</sup>, boldly argued that the development of society is much more influenced by technological development of means of communication than means of production, as Karl Marx wrote. “At a very inconvenient time, Marx based his analysis on a machine, at the very moment when the telegraph and other implosive forms began to reverse mechanical dynamics” (McLuhan 1971: 76). This thought has remained in the shadow of the much more famous McLuhan’s motto “the medium is the message” and the image of the “world as a global village”, although it is completely in line with them. Not mentioning Marx, McLuhan’s thesis is indirectly confirmed by Roger Fiedler by introducing the notion of “mediamorphosis” as a transformation of communication media that changes the human world. The first mediamorphosis was marked by the appearance of speech, the second by writing, and the third by the transmission of information and communication by means of electricity. “This phase of the third great mediamorphosis has obviously contributed to the ever-greater growth of expectations of constant entertainment and emotional stimulation, as well as the increasing human ability to process multiple media inputs simultaneously. [...] One of the consequences of these changes is a significant social shift away from literacy and mediated content towards images and interaction” (Fidler 2004: 184).

We have to accept McLuhan’s thesis with reservations, because the media are also the means of producing information of different types and purposes, processed and adapted to the forms of a specific medium that addresses the audience. As for Fiedler, we dare to see a change that we might consider revolutionary in technological expansion of the late twentieth century and innovation in data transmission over the World Wide Web, which would permit us to declare it a new, digital mediamorphosis.

It could be said that the fourth mediamorphosis began with the advent of the Internet, although in 1997, when he published the book “Mediamorphosis”, Fiedler did not recognize it as fundamentally different from the third, primarily due to the use of electricity. However, Stanford University in the United States was already experimenting with computer’s work and data transmission only by light, which McLuhan considered a pure medium, a form without any content that changes the world and lives of people, by illuminating the planet and turning night into day. “The example of electric light can, in this regard, prove instructive. Electric light is pure information. It is, so to speak, media without a message, unless it is used to print an ad or a name. [...] It doesn’t matter if the light is used for brain surgery or night baseball matches. It could be argued that these activities are in some way the ‘content’ of electric light, because they could not exist without it” (McLuhan, 1971: 42).

What is new in the understanding of light is the idea that, thanks to its dual nature, wave and corpuscular, photons could transmit information, which would

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<sup>3</sup> This book was first published in Yugoslavia in 1971. by Belgrade's "Prosveta", and translator Slobodan Djordjevic, hesitating between the English term "media" and "means of public information" established in the socialist state, created the neologism "opštita" (communicators) which was not well accepted either in Serbia or in Croatia, or in the entire area of the common Serbo-Croatian / Croato-Serbian language of the period. "Poznavanje opštita" has remained a rare book without new editions with that title. In brief, “communicators” were excommunicated, while the book, paradoxically, was still read, since for a long time there was no other translation into our common language.

simplify and speed up communication to unimaginable proportions, both on our planet and in cosmic relations.

Truth be told, at the end of the twentieth century, Fiedler noted that there was optimism in scientific circles about the development of a technology of light wave communication: “Although scientists have long assumed that visible light can serve for more efficient communication, until almost the end of the 1960s, they failed to demonstrate its astonishing ability to transmit and store digital data” (Fidler 2004: 252-253). To this day, the two most important inventions in this field are laser and fiber optic cables –the “glass wires” or optical fibers that replaced much thicker copper cables: “The most difficult problem that has yet to be overcome is, apparently, the development of faster and more intelligent optical switches in order to direct the ‘packaging’ of information that travels at the speed of light” (Fidler 2004: 254).

The development of technology leads to further research of the cosmos and the microworld, revealing their interconnectedness and interdependence. In this task, humans will be helped by their “extensions” such as artificial intelligence, as was discussed in mid-November 2021 by Jelena Vučković, a professor of electrical engineering at Stanford University, at the lecture “Inverse designed photonics: Are computers better than humans in designing photonics?” Photonics is the science of guiding and manipulating light that has found most use in many applications such as optical interconnections, optical computer platforms for artificial intelligence or quantum computing, augmented reality glasses, biosensors, medical imaging systems and sensors in autonomous vehicles. The main mission for researchers now is to reduce the dimensions of compact accelerators by as much as 10,000 times from traditional accelerators (going from miles to inches in size) (<https://news.mit.edu/2021/jelena-vuckovic-2021-dresselhaus-lecture-inverse-designed-photonics-1206>).

In the near future, this could lead to commercial applications that would make even personal computers super powerful machines, accessible to a wide audience of users, as well as creators of new content and forms, transmedia narratives applicable in scientific, artistic and everyday communication. The development of technology is likely to lead to multiplication of messages, stories and images that an individual cannot adequately process without critical selection. As a result, media education is gaining importance and becoming a necessity for all ages and categories of the population, regardless of their occupations.

While waiting for future discoveries and new mediamorphoses, we have long noticed that the media do not represent the world as it objectively is, but create representations of it. Quite in the spirit of Immanuel Kant and the subjectivity of each of our judgments, not only about the beautiful and pleasant, but about everything we observe and think of: “The judgment of taste is by no means a judgment of knowledge, therefore is not logical but aesthetic, by which we mean the judgment whose determining reason cannot be other than subjective. But any relation of notions, even a relation of emotions, can be objective (and then it means the reality of an empirical notion); only the relation with the feeling of pleasure or displeasure cannot be objective, as it does not mean absolutely anything in the object, but in which the

subject feels oneself the way the notion affects him” (Kant 1975: 93). Contaminated by personal and group interests, in the absence or abundance of information that is difficult to verify, recipients watch informative and entertaining programs with equal passion, which leads to the neglect of logic and dominance of emotional probability in inference. A convincing story illustrated with video recordings will usually prevail in a duel with dull facts presented without a narrator.

Not only is McLuhan’s claim “the medium is the message” confirmed in our digital age, but the media have contributed to the creation of the world as the Baudrillard’s simulacrum (1991), and the insistence of writer Vladimir Nabokov that the word “reality” should always be written in quotation marks (Genette 2004: 93) is no longer eccentricity, but necessity. We are all “immersed” in the virtual world of the media, a kaleidoscope of endless images that do not cease multiplying, so it is increasingly difficult to distinguish facts from interpretations, truth from lies, facts from factoids. The term “factoid” was coined by the American writer Norman Mailer (1973) to denote information that is accepted as fact even though it is not true. It is often trivial or completely fabricated, but it gains credibility through publication in the press or electronic media that give it “legitimacy”. This is also how it is defined in Webster’s dictionary, as “an invented fact believed to be true because it appears in print” and “a briefly stated and usually trivial fact” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/factoid>).

The problem of superficiality and the aspiration for entertainment to dominate in all spheres goes far beyond the media because education tries to imitate the dynamics of media images, without a deeper understanding, thinks linguist Noam Chomsky: “For example, if you look at ‘Science magazine’, editor-in-chief Bruce Alberts has a series of editorials condemning the way science is taught in America. In federally funded schools and universities, people are taught factoids; they make them remember the periodic table and not understand what it is about. Alberts says that this creates a completely wrong image of the nature of science in people, and that it distances children from science. If what he describes overwhelms the education system, it will probably lead to a decline in scientific expertise and capacity” (<https://pescanik.net/intervju-sa-noamom-comskim/>).

Throughout the history of civilization, information has been important for the survival of human communities. The development of the mass media has led to the present condition in which we need protection from enormous amounts of information. A picture speaks more than a thousand words, but thousands of pictures are fighting for our attention at every moment. The contemporary culture is reminiscent of a media supermarket in which we buy what we don’t need, while missing the necessities, such as spiritual food.

## 2. Meta-referential turn of the media towards their own “reality”

Contemporary man is lost in the abyss of media images (*mise en abyme*<sup>4</sup>), much like “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” (Carroll 1865), experiencing an even deeper fall into the world, as in “Through the Looking-Glass” (Carroll 1871). On the other side of reality, those mirrors are crooked and give a distorted image of both the world and the people themselves. The media-fueled image has eaten the identity just like “sheep ate men” in the time of Thomas More (1516) because arable land was turned into pasture: “They who are so mild and who eat so little have now, as I hear, begun to be so voracious and wild that they devour people, strip fields, devastate houses and settlements” (More 2002: 55-56).

The laws of the market impose on the media the struggle for profit as the only way of survival. Under the influence of tabloids and reality shows, the audience expects a spectacle in the prime time and amusement in the entire program. Being famous becomes an imperative devoid of Warholian irony, and the screens show perpetual parade of “celebrities and celestoids” (Vukadinović 2013: 62-63). In such a constellation of powers, deontological principles of responsibility for the written and publicly spoken word are neglected, because in a consumer society, buying any product that can be associated with glamorous stars is a substitute for prayer, and the shopping center becomes a surrogate temple. Everyday life of viewers is greatly influenced by celebrities, and the media encourages such idolatry since it increases their viewership. Reality without the influence of media is archaic and uninteresting, and as a final consequence of the mediatization of reality, the media are increasingly dealing with what they alone have produced: their heroes from the media Olympus created in the studio, with the wholehearted support of grateful audiences, in front of the screens or in that same studio. In our times, media fame has become a substitute for immortality.

This metamedia preoccupation with themselves produces a narcissistically oriented media culture. At the same time, many of the media often use the same narrative that is transmedially reshaped, and is based on the process of “metaization”, the result of which is marked by the transmedia term “metareference”: “A connotational difference may (but need not) be created by tendentially employing ‘metaization’ when referring to a process and ‘metareference’ whenever the result is in focus” (Wolf 2009: 12-13).

At the end of the twentieth century, it took on such proportions, primarily in Western culture, that in the theory of narratology, this phenomenon was marked as a “meta-referential turn”. However, due to the fashionability of the term “turn”, from “linguistic turn” (1950) to “reflective turn” (2006) – which culminated in the ironic “turnological turn” (Kaube 2006: 199), debates began over whether “there is a metareferential turn and if so, how can it be explained?” (Wolf 2011: 1). The

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<sup>4</sup> In Western art history *mise en abyme* is a formal technique of placing a copy of an image within itself, often in a way that suggests an infinitely recurring sequence. In film theory and literary theory, it refers to the technique of inserting a story within a story. The term is derived from heraldry literally means “placed into abyss”. It was first appropriated for modern criticism by the French author Andre Gide.

arguments of the opponents of this term are based on the fact that metaphenomena have always existed in art and the media, which could mean that the increase in metareferentiality is only an illusion encouraged by enormously increased production. It was also pointed out that the introduction of the new term leads to increased sensitivity of media researchers, which makes them more aware of the metareferential process, so that they are now noticing it everywhere. The disputes also included linking metareference to postmodernism, which is prone to fragmentation, as well as referring to Dan Sperber's anthropological characterization of man as what one might term a "metareferential animal"<sup>5</sup> (Sperber 2000: 117-137).

Taking all the remarks into account, German narratologist and media theorist Werner Wolf points out that the media dealing with itself – metaization, has disproportionately increased and, more importantly, reached a new quality in contemporary art and media: "According to my hypothesis, the metareferential turn is thus not merely the effect of a shift in scholarly perspective but like, for example, the 'visual turn' belongs to the class of 'turns' which denote a change in the objects under discussion as well as in scholarly perspective" (Wolf 2011: 7). In other words, not only has the researcher's view of media and artistic content changed, but the reality itself occurs "immersed" in virtual worlds and its comprehension is mediated by them as another of the possible storyworlds.

However, while narratologists shifted the focus from narrative to narrativity as a process and studied the transposition of the story from one medium to another, a shift occurred in transfictionality as a key concept of transmedial narratology. In addition to meta-media in the technological sense of uniting the old and the new, an approach to the production of media content as also become meta-medial: some watch and listen to others and react to it, from influencers, bloggers and vloggers, to public media services and private companies. The democratization of social media has enabled each user to become an actor, participant and protagonist of the simulated world. However, despite the great opportunity for everyone to become a co-author of a work in the digital world, which has led to "the myth of interactivity" (Manovich 2015: 97), life in a virtual community is basically reduced to clicks and superficial communication without sincere human contact.

Different concepts in the theory of narratology and media theory are not insurmountable obstacles to understanding: what modern narratologists like Wolf call "metareference" is close to the concept of "metonymy" as understood by Lev Manovich in the language of digital media. The first significant step was taken by Roman Jakobson, one of the most important linguists of the twentieth century, who applied computer binary logic in the analysis of rhetorical turns and reduced them all to two basic concepts: metaphor and metonymy. In our time, Manovich noticed a tendency of reducing turns to only one figure: "Finally, during the 1990s, the hyperlinks of the world wide web gave priority to metonymy at the expense of all

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<sup>5</sup> Dan Sperber attributes to humans a "metarepresentational capacity" that is "no less fundamental than the faculty for language", and he claims that "[u]nderstanding the character and the role of this [...] capacity might change our view of what it is to be human" (2000a: 6f.)



others. The hypertext of the world wide web leads the reader from one text to another ad infinitum. Contrary to the popular image of a computer medium that compresses all knowledge of the world into a single library (which would imply the existence of a particular classification system), or a giant book (which would imply narrative order), perhaps it is better to imagine the culture of new media as an infinite flat surface on which individual texts are arranged without any special order and system, similarly to a web page” (Manovich 2015: 119-120).

Metonymy, a stylistic figure to which all other figures can be reduced in the digital age, enables any recipient, with a real name and surname, to acquire a fluid identity in the virtual world. This is applicable not only to the way he presents himself, but also to any interaction with everyone else he enters into communication. Thus, the definition of transfictionality (transmediality) as a “movement of fictional entities through different texts/media” (Ryan 2013: 365) expands its meaning and includes the movement of real people as avatars through the virtual space. This unites the real world with all other worlds into a common “reality”, confirming the vision of the writer Vladimir Nabokov of a personal understanding of reality.

The philosophical question, whether a person remains the same by moving through media stories and images like an actor of art, imposes an additional dilemma: does the world he returns to from those travels remain intact or is it absorbed by the media into cyberspace? Cognitive narratology views narrativity as the recipient’s mental activity, which would mean that if it is absent, then there is no experience of moving through virtual worlds, similar to the inability to perceive metareference connections because stimuli are too weak to evoke higher levels of consciousness. This does not mean, however, that storyworlds exist independently of each other, but that the core of the story has different media manifestations in different forms, times and contexts. Modern man, a user of various media, from traditional to digital, functions meta-medially from his reality in many virtual spaces. There are three possibilities: “1. A one-text / one-world relation; 2. A one-text / many-worlds relation; 3. A one-world / many-texts relation” (Ryan 2013: 365). The term “text” should be understood here in a broader sense as any possible medium of communication.

Is metareference a sign of the decadence of contemporary culture in which the media meditate, continuously “navel gazing”, instead of dealing with more serious issues outside the domain of their own? It is certain that art and the media have other tasks besides self-reflection, but their self-reflection would be pointless if modern societies did not function as media communities. Today’s public virtually does not exist outside the media, because even significant deeds remain marginalized out of reach of the cameras of our technologically advanced visual civilization. In the light of that self-preoccupation of the media, the modern world is reminiscent of a goose that laid a golden egg and then, being so amazed by the event, died of starvation waiting to see if it would happen again. Advocating the evaluation of cultural manifestations in practice, Werner Wolf concludes the foreword to “The Metareferential Turn in Contemporary Arts and Media - Forms, Functions, Attempts at Explanation” (2011) with the poem “Ars Poetica” written by X.J. Kennedy in the

1960s as a warning to himself and others who created meta-poetry and meta-art, neglecting everything but self-reflection:

“The goose that laid the golden egg  
Died looking up its crotch  
To find out how its sphincter worked.  
Would you lay well? Don’t watch.”  
(Wolf 2009: 38-39).

Werner Wolf, a German theorist of narratology, calls this self-absorption of the media a “meta-referential turn” that completely changes contemporary culture, and hesitates between assessing it as increasingly sophisticated and requiring the recipient to possess ever more knowledge to understand it, and quite the opposite estimate that it represents the decadence and giving in of most recipients to media “images inside images” and “stories inside stories” that lead to habituation and consent to manipulation. This position is close to Gramsci’s stance on hegemony and the spontaneous consent of the subordinate class to be ruled over, as in the days of Ancient Rome and the saying *panem et circenses*, which perfectly corresponds to the media circus in which the modern man is immersed.

Louis Althusser’s notion of “consent” is close to this understanding of the functioning of the society of liberal capitalism, while the most direct connection between the media and government is seen by Stuart Hall, who claims in McLuhan’s footsteps: “The mass media is the most important apparatus of modern capitalism” (Hall according to McQueen 2000: 307).

Metalepsis as a permutation of reality and fiction, so that “the picture has to go outside the frame”, which was the advice given to Velázquez by his teacher Pacheco (Genette 2006: 64), is only a partial definition of this stylistic figure, which is very familiar to contemporary art and media audiences accustomed to the reverse procedure: one’s own entry into the picture frame, changeable frames that, like mirrors, show the one who wants to be reflected in them. The closeness of metalepsis to metaphor and metonymy makes it a meta-reference phenomenon, but we can indulge or resist its seductiveness: “An aesthetic illusion does not function today in a completely different way than in the past; it always contains a part of distancing of the media consciousness or the awareness of fictionality – that is what distinguishes it from deception. [...] The change that has taken place is a change in degree, it has broadened the margins of tolerance within which metaization can coexist with immersion” (Wolf 2011: 28-29).

Etymology gives the answer to the objections that narratology is just another theory: the Greek word *theoria* comes from the verb *theorein* which means “to look at something, to observe, to spectate”. Although the ancient Greeks have also associated theory with intellect, the root of the word stems from the visual aspect. That brings theory closer to practice and presents the knowledge which explains a world made up of media images and an image of a naturally created world.

The reality of the modern man is largely intertwined with the media messages in which the image dominates, while sound, speech and text interpret and reinforce the meaning. The media tools are powerful means of presenting events and creating

narratives. However, in spite of the possibilities for manipulation, the audience is not passive. The individual chooses whether to accept the message without questioning its ideological code or to actively seek answers that he considers more true. A huge number of media and the metamedia culture flood us with a “blizzard” of information, but at the same time enable critical reading of dominant narratives and search for alternative solutions. Knowledge of theories and media practice gives the recipients the power to preserve freedom of opinion and not lose themselves in the abyss of media images and their imposed interpretation. A proactive approach is the best way to boldly step through the media maze and find a way out of “the garden of forking paths” at all times.

### **3. Conclusion**

The media are a special sphere of artistic expression, but most of their program content is directed towards the commercial and ideological effect. Each medium requires a specific approach to decoding its messages, and new media always contain all the previous ones, as McLuhan presented in detail: “The effect of the media becomes strong and deep precisely because it is given another medium as ‘content’. The contents of a film are a novel, a play or an opera. [...] The ‘content’ of written or printed text is speech, but the reader is almost completely unaware of either print or speech” (McLuhan 1971: 53).

Dedicating himself to the analysis of television, John Fisk expresses admiration for its possibilities: “Television is, by all accounts, the most important creative medium, not only in the 20th century, but probably in the entire history of mankind” (Fisk 1978: 31). Less than two decades later, the focus shifted to the Internet, but the convergence of the press, radio, television and new digital media has led to the creation of an even more powerful meta-medium. Reality has not disappeared, but its cognition has become multimedial in most parts of the planet.

Contemporary narratology is focused on the functioning of the same narratives in different media in order to determine distinctions and notice a new quality in the transmedia transformation of a message and the capabilities of the audience to process it. Narrativity is not objectively present in the text, but depends on the cognitive frame of the observer, which encompasses all their knowledge and experience. Therefore, any media and artistic adaptation of a story can be considered a new work. Knowledge of the original text is not obligatory, however, to understand and experience the metatext in the spectrum of metareferential meanings, it is good to know the prototext. For example, the ballet “Who’s Singin’ Over There?” (Serbian: “Ko to tamo peva?”) (2004) will be received differently by the audience who watched the film of the same name (1980) than by those who do not even know the film was made. The main reason for this is that each medium has its own language of expression.

Reality has always been mediated by language, but in the 21st century it is the language of the meta-medial digital computer: “I study the language of the new

media by placing it within the history of modern medial and visual cultures. How do the new media connect with older cultural forms and languages, and how do they break with them? What is new in the way in which the new media create the illusion of reality, address the viewer and represent space and time?" (Manovich 2015: 49).

Meta-medial language implies a boundless context and a new discourse for which transmediality is essential. The written and spoken word and the picture shown are necessary to tell a story, but they are only signs of, not references to the real world. The sign groups are very similar so that they can be replaced by each other within a narrative, which "converts" a "syntagm as a linear sequence into a paradigm with countless possibilities to present a story in the media" (Crnobrnja 2010: 38).

Under the influence of television in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Internet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fundamental changes emerged in the formation of narration in all areas of life. The media adapted to the demands of a diverse audience and managed to offer a replacement for folkloric culture, but also a high-value content that attracted elitist groups from various fields, from art to science and politics. Thus, both "low" and "high" culture were successfully commercialized and put in a position to communicate with each other through the media. The result, notes the French semiologist Roland Barthes, is that "the notion of reality" has been replaced by the notion of "reality created by culture" and that we are left with "reconciliation of realities and people, descriptions and explanations, objects and knowledge" (Barthes 1957: 234).

One could discuss whether there is an "innocent" view of the world at all, beyond any, even the most rudimentary, culture of the "noble savage" praised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in "Emile, or On Education" (1762). However, it is certain that in our time the word culture can be replaced by the word media or even better: media culture. Today, it is the dominant form of culture, essential for understanding social trends, because "media culture is the scene of a battle for supremacy between key social groups and opposing political ideologies" (Kellner 2004: 7).

This entails the acknowledgment that "original reality" is incomprehensible, and might even not exist, except in the form of a TV scene or an Internet sequence. Serbian film theorist Vladimir Petrić, the first doctor of film studies in the USA and a professor at Harvard University, believes that the boundaries between factual and fictional have already disappeared: "Television is destined to erase the line between 'artistic reality' and 'real reality', because it is television that proves that it is possible to discover the basic aesthetic qualities in the direct registration of real facts, and therefore in real life" (Crnobrnja 2010: 71).

The opposite case is also possible, and "real life" can be found in art and media. One of the most interesting historical examples is given by Gerard Genette (2006: 42), explaining metalepsis as a figure of crossing the line between reality and fiction: in the play "The Impromptu of Versailles" by Moliere, he also acts, and improvising on stage he took on the role of the Brecourt-knight to explain to the Brecourt-actor how to act. Moliere then stepped out of the role and uttered a line of the Marquis, then again, a line of the knight, and thus acted the whole scene himself, turning the

other actors into an audience, which thrilled those present and became an integral part of subsequent performances, including the one before King Louis XIV. Such virtuosity in the intertwining of narrative and reality is possible only if the writer, actor and director are the same person, and the audience is well informed.

This may also be a recipe for modern recipients of media content so that they do not feel lost in the abyss of media images, but that requires a more creative approach of both audiences and media productions. The development of technology will surely enable every user to participate in content that surpasses video games, and the imagination of the creator can make use of the most ordinary things to make magic. A striking example is Marcel Duchamp, a contemporary of Albert Einstein, who dared to relativize the aesthetic rules of his era and turn the urinal into an object of art. At the exhibition of the “Society of Independent Artists” in 1917, he presented it under the pseudonym R. Matt with the name “Fountain”, and this action had something of Moliere’s spirit, because Duchamp was also a member of the jury. By this ironic approach he disturbed the public, and his artistic procedure was called “readymade”, because he claimed that every object could be treated as artistic if chosen by the artist.

The life of a modern man flows simultaneously in two worlds, one that he considers reality and the other created by the media. Technological advances have made media images very reminiscent of a life course that is not a static but a dynamic process, the River of Heraclitus in which it is impossible to step twice. This similarity relativizes the boundaries between the real and all the possible worlds, considering that the media create a “reality of a higher level”. It allows the user to become acquainted with the planet and different cultures while never leaving their room, be informed about real events and immersed in fictional stories from movies and TV shows. Therefore, our digital age is often metaphorically presented as “The Matrix” (1999), a film inspired by Baudrillard’s book “Simulacra and Simulation” (1981). Hence the view of the man of our time as a hero who has to choose between the blue pill of oblivion and the red one that leads to the dangers of freedom to reveal the truth, which is in fact the old dilemma of choosing between bread and liberty. Under the threatening shadow of nuclear Armageddon, one is trying to find a way out of the abyss of ideological doctrines supported by the military, economic power and the power of the media to manipulate the public. The modern age of relentless exploitation of all resources has made planet Earth similar to Duchamp’s readymade artifact.

Humanity is always left with hope, at the bottom of Pandora’s meta-media box, that the world will not collapse under the weight of media images or dissipate due to their unreality. If that does happen, it is comforting that the most perfect cameras will continue to record everything, and if the newest technology works only by light, even without human influence. Pure form, pure media, but left without a story that only one being can tell: *homo narrans*. That is true whether he lives in the real world or the simulacrum, because the story is the foundation of every reality.

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## METAREFERENTNA STVARNOST U AMBISU MEDIJSKIH SLIKA I TEORIJA

**Apstrakt.** Makluanova tvrdnja „mediji su poruka“ izrečena u doba ekspanzije televizije šezdesetih godina XX veka, potvrđena je pojavom interneta, društvenih mreža i digitalnom transformacijom savremenog društva. Medijska forma obuhvata recipijente postajući sredina stvarnija od realnosti poput Bodrijarovog simulakruma. „Uronjeni“ u medijski kaleidoskop u kome se „slike u slici“ vrtoglavo umnožavaju, korisnici sve teže razlikuju činjenice od interpretacija, fakta od faktoida, izgubljeni u virtuelnom prostoru beskrajnih priča kao „Alisa u zemlji čuda“. Tehnološki napredak, proizvođači nove, sačuvao je sve stare medije, poput ruskih „matrjoški“, ali je potisnuo istinu i moralne dileme u drugi plan. Zabava je postala glavni medijski sadržaj, informacije se plasiraju kroz infotainment formu, uz brzo smenjivanje slika kao popularizovana „montaža atrakcija“. Marksova fasciniranost mašinama i proizvodnim snagama kao „društvenim bićem koje određuje svest ljudi“ doživela je neobičnu inverziju: medijska produkcija mnogo sofisticiranije reprezentuje i kreira pogled na svet od teške industrije koja kao relikv prošlosti postaje ekološka pretnja opstanku čovečanstva i planete. „Stvarnost“, reč koju na insistiranje književnika Nabokova uvek treba pisati pod navodnicima, predstavlja zadivljujući artefakt medija i njihovih moćnih gospodara, a planeta Zemlja upotrebljena je kao Dišanov „ready made“, postajući tako medijsko i umetničko delo podvrgnuto besomučnoj eksploataciji radi profita. Ovladavanje Manovičevim „jezikom novih medija“ neophodno je za razumevanje savremene informacione i vizuelne kulture kako bi komunikacija među ljudima uopšte bila moguća, jer je savremena kultura metareferentna, zagledana u samu sebe. Kritičko razumevanje sveta, za šta je neophodna medijska pismenost i kontinuirano medijsko obrazovanje, jedini je način da se ne bude saučesnik u urušavanju realnosti pod težinom medijskih slika koje brišu okvir između realnosti i fikcije, činjenica i teorijskih interpretacija.

**Ključne reči:** metareferentna stvarnost, mediji, poruka, medijska slika, teorija



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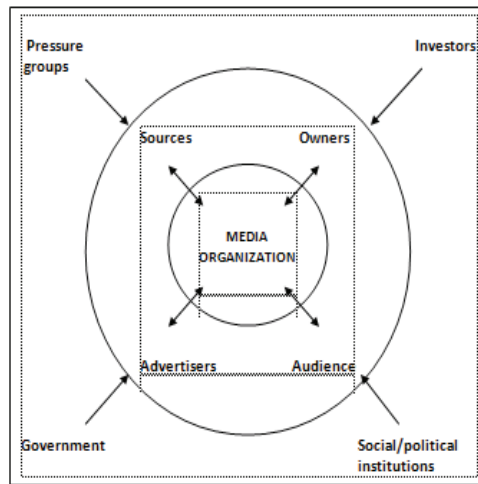
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**Fig. 1** The media environment: source of demand and constraint (McQuail, 1992: 82)

**Tables**

All tables should be numbered with consecutive Arabic numbers. They should have descriptive captions at the top of each table and should be mentioned in the text.

**Table 2** Press freedom (McQuail, 1992: 102)

	<i>Whose freedom?</i>	<i>From what?</i>	<i>To do what?</i>
Level of structure	Proprietor	Censorship; unfair taxes;	Publish/sell news and views; not to publish; start a new publication
Level of conduct	Editor	State; proprietorial and outside interference (advertisers, sponsors, etc.)	Print news and views; gather information; not to print; advocate views; criticize
Level of performance	Public	Lack of choice; bias in news and views	Hear news and views; express own views

**Citation:**

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E.g. (McQuail, 1992: 34).

In the case of two authors, both last names should be written in parentheses. E.g. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

If there are more than two, but less than six authors, when the reference appeared in the text it needed to name the last names of all authors, and every next time only the last name of the first author and abbreviation: et al.

E.g. (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, Zittrain & Stein, 2008) – first time (Deibert et. al., 2008) – every next time

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