

MEDIA STUDIES AND APPLIED ETHICS



<https://doi.org/10.46630/msac.2.2024>

Publishing Operations Editor

Maja D. Stojković, PhD

Editor-in chief

Andrej Blagojević, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Editorial board

Andon Majhosev, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Law, University, Goce Delcev, North Macedonia

Andrijana Rabrenović, Expert from Practice-Lecturer at Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Montenegro, Montenegro

Anka Mihajlov Prokopović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Anke Offerhaus, Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research, University of Bremen, Germany

Belma Buljubašić, Department of Communicology/Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bojan Blagojević, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Dejan Pralica, Media Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia

Dejan Vučetić, Faculty of Law, University of Niš, Serbia

Dragan Todorović, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Gražina Čiuladienė, Institute of Communication, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Iris Vidmar, Department of Philosophy, Center for Language Research, University of Rijeka, Croatia

Ivan Cvetanović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Ivana Stojanović Prelević, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Janina Wildfeuer, Multimodal Linguistic and Media Studies, Bremen University, Germany

Jelena Vučković, Faculty of Law, University of Kragujevac, Serbia

Jovan Babić, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Marina Mučalo, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Martina Topić, Senior Lecturer in Public Relations at Leeds Business School, Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom

Nataša Simeunović Bajić, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Paolo Cavalieri, member of SCRIPT a law and technology research center, School of Law, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Vladeta Radović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Technical Secretary

Ilija Milosavljević, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

University of Nis
Faculty of Philosophy

MEDIA STUDIES AND APPLIED ETHICS

Vol. V, No 2, 2024



Niš, 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Borislav Vukojević, Dalibor Savić MEDIA CONVERGENCE OF ROLE-PLAYING GAMES (1974- 2024): FROM PARTICIPATION TO COMMODIFICATION AND BACK AGAIN	7
Milica Kulić ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE MEDIA IN SERBIA: WHEN SATIRE ISN'T FUNNY	23
Ilija Milosavljević DOMESTIC VIDEO STREAMING SERVICES - CHARACTERISTICS, OFFER AND PERCEPTION OF USERS IN SERBIA	35
Nikola Doderović AGORA ON THE INTERNET: CAN X'S SPACES BE INTERPRETED AS A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR DEMOCRACY?	47
Danica Popović RESPONSIBILITY IN CITIZEN JOURNALISM: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES	63

Media Convergence of Role-playing Games (1974-2024): From Participation to Commodification and Back Again¹

Borislav Vukojević²³, senior teaching assistant on the Faculty of Political Sciences
University of Banja Luka

Dalibor Savić⁴, associate professor on the Faculty of Political Sciences University
of Banja Luka

Abstract

This study examines the impact of media convergences on the evolution of role-playing games (RPGs) from the early 1970s to the present day. The analytical focus of this research is directed at the dynamics between player community participation and the process of commodification within this genre. In this context, specific phases in the development of RPGs are highlighted, including tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), classic computer role-playing games (CRPGs), massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), live-action role-playing (LARP), and actual play (AP). This study highlights the similarities and differences between these forms, their mutual convergence, and their convergence with other analog and digital media (such as books, comics, television, film, and podcasts). Special attention is given to the phenomenon of prosumerism within the RPG subculture; that is, the specific interaction between the content offered by the entertainment industry and the efforts of RPG communities to maintain the participative and creative aspects of the genre. This research is based on a diachronic comparison of specific phases in the development of the RPG genre, as well as a secondary analysis of the dominant media content on current trends in the RPG subculture.

Keywords: *RPG, media convergence, Critical role, World of Warcraft, commodification*

Media Convergence of Role-Playing Games (1974-2024): From participation to commodification and back again

Introduction

The transformation of role-playing games over the past half-century has been intricately linked to the convergence of various media platforms and the evolving

¹ This paper was presented at the International Scientific Conference *Media and Challenges of the Modern Society*, held on May 30–31, 2024, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.

² Corresponding author: borislav.vukojevic@fpn.unibl.org

³ ORCID: 0009-0007-9304-2371

⁴ ORCID: 0000-0001-5703-9107

dynamics between content creators and player communities. From the humble beginnings of tabletop role-playing games in the 1970s to the immersive virtual worlds of massively multiplayer online role-playing games and the rise of live-action role-playing and actual play formats, the RPG genre has undergone a remarkable evolution, reflecting broader shifts in the entertainment industry and changing patterns of audience engagement (Brunette, 2015).

As RPG games gained popularity, the industry began to commodify the RPG experience by introducing a range of supplementary materials, including rulebooks, adventure modules, and an array of physical game components. However, this process of commodification was not a one-way street, as RPG communities actively engaged in shaping the genre, contributing to the development of new mechanics, narrative elements, and even subgenres.

The advent of computer-based role-playing games, or CRPGs, has further expanded the reach of the RPG genre, allowing players to immerse themselves in virtual worlds and experience narrative and gameplay in new, interactive ways (Cragoe, 2016). The development of these games was informed by the participatory culture of the tabletop RPG community, as designers sought to capture the essence of collaborative storytelling and character progression in digital media (Maravić, 2022).

One of the most significant developments in the RPG industry has been the emergence of massively multiplayer online role-playing games, which have revolutionized the genre by offering vast, persistent virtual worlds in which players can interact, collaborate, and compete with thousands of others simultaneously (Brunette, 2015; Maravić, 2022). World of Warcraft is the most popular, even if it was not the first MMORPG ever released, with more than eight million active players in the first year of release (Vukojević and Španović, 2023).

The concept of prosumerism, whereby consumers actively participate in the production and shaping of the content they consume, is particularly relevant to the RPG genre. RPG communities have long been known for their active engagement in creating fan-made content and organizing community events and conventions (Chalk, 2022). This dynamic interplay between the industry's efforts to commodify the RPG experience and players' desires to maintain the participatory and creative aspects of the genre has been a driving force in its evolution.

The research presented in this study examined the impact of media convergence on the evolution of role-playing games from the early 1970s to the present. The analysis focused on the dynamics between player community participation and the process of commodification within the RPG genre, highlighting specific phases in its development, including tabletop role-playing games, classic computer role-playing games, massively multiplayer online role-playing games, live-action role-playing, and actual play.

Method

The main objective of the paper is to explore how the dynamics between commodification and participation within the RPG genre influence its evolution and diversification. The methodological framework of the research is based on two approaches: diachronic comparison and secondary data analysis. Diachronic comparison focuses on identifying similarities and differences between various phases in the development of the RPG genre and its subgenres. This approach serves as a foundation for determining their specificities and it aims at positioning them on a continuum from participatory to commodification practices. Secondary data analysis, primarily of expert literature and specialized online content, provided the basis for two case studies: the MMORPG “World of Warcraft” and the AP “Critical Role.” These cases were chosen as the most popular examples of RPG content that, through the context of media convergence, have managed to transcend the tension between lucrative interests and community-driven creativity, starting from different initial positions (as outliers) —the first as a commercial project and the second as a participatory project.

Media Convergence Theory and Theory of prosumerism and commodification

Media convergence has emerged as a prominent field of study in the digital age as the boundaries between traditional and new media continue to blur. At its core, media convergence refers to the integration of various media platforms, technologies, and content driven by the increased adoption of digital technologies and the Internet (Lawson-Borders, 2003).

One of the foundational perspectives on media convergence is the “Seven Observations of Convergence” proposed by Everett Rogers’ diffusion of innovations theory. This framework suggests that successful media convergence strategies involve the integration of new and old media, leveraging the respective advantages of each platform to enhance the overall user experience and operational efficiency. Additionally, bibliometric analysis of media convergence research in China has revealed a similar pattern, with an initial focus on theoretical underpinnings and technical support, followed by a broader exploration of content integration, industry-specific applications, and case studies (Xuerui, 2022; Feng et al., 2020). It is also important to understand that convergence encompasses three interconnected processes: transmediation, adaptation, and remediation (Booth, 2015). All three of these processes are significant for the RPG genre, as there is no linear convergence process with clear rules: sometimes it involves adaptation to new media (such as short formats on YouTube), and sometimes it involves creating a series featuring characters from the RPG community (like Critical Role and their series *The Legend of Vox Machina*), or it can be a process of remediation when a new medium successfully enhances an ‘old’ medium (a book bringing the focus back to TRPG).

The rise of digital technologies has significantly transformed the image of consumption, giving rise to new phenomena, such as commodification and prosumerism. Commodification refers to the process by which products or services are transformed into commodities, with their value determined by the market rather than their intrinsic worth (Leparoux et al., 2019). This shift has been driven, in part, by the increasing digitalization of consumer behavior, as consumers rely more on online platforms and social media to inform their purchasing decisions (Leparoux et al., 2019). Prosumerism has emerged as a significant trend in tandem with the commodification of consumption. Prosumerism refers to the blurring of the lines between producers and consumers, as individuals actively participate in the creation and customization of the products and services they consume (Jansom & Pongsakornrungsilp, 2021; Leparoux et al., 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021; Stankevich, 2017).

The growth of digital technologies has enabled prosumers to play a more active role in the value-creation process, collaborating with brands and other consumers to shape the products and services they consume. This transformation of consumption has had a profound impact on how value is perceived and communicated. In the past, the value of a product or service was often determined by its physical attributes or the expertise of the producer, and the digital economy shifted the locus of value creation to consumers (Morewedge et al., 2020).

A Brief History of RPGs: Between Community and Commodity

The inception of tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) dates to the 1974 release of *Dungeons & Dragons* by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, which introduced key elements like character creation, storytelling, and rule-based gameplay (Gygax & Arneson, 1974). The 1980s and 1990s saw the genre expand with titles like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Shadowrun*, incorporating horror and cyberpunk themes (White et al., 2018). TRPGs foster community through local groups and conventions like Gen Con and PAX, offering opportunities for networking and game participation (Orr et al., 2018; Chalk, 2022).

Key publishers include Wizards of the Coast, Paizo Publishing, and Chaosium, producing rulebooks, adventure modules, and supplementary materials (Chalk, 2022). Crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter have empowered independent creators, and TRPG-related merchandise (e.g., miniatures, dice) has become popular (Byers & Crocco, 2016). The rise of Actual Play (AP) content, such as *Critical Role* and *The Adventure Zone*, has broadened the TRPG audience, driving sales and cultural interest (Orr et al., 2018).

Development of computer role-playing games (CRPGs) began in the late 1970s with *Akalabeth* and *Ultima*, adapting TRPG mechanics to digital formats (Barton & Stacks, 2019). Multiplayer modes in games like *Diablo* and *Baldur's Gate* foster community through online play, and modding allows players to create and share custom content (Barton & Stacks, 2019). Platforms like Twitch and YouTube have further enhanced CRPG engagement by offering gameplay streams, tutorials,

and reviews, attracting new players and maintaining interest in older titles (Byers & Crocco, 2016).

MMORPGs emerged in the 1990s with *Ultima Online* and *EverQuest*, allowing thousands of players to interact in persistent online worlds. The genre saw mainstream success with *World of Warcraft* in 2004, which set new standards with its expansive world and community (Deterding & Zagal, 2018). Many MMORPGs initially used subscription models but later adopted free-to-play systems that generate revenue through microtransactions (Deterding & Zagal, 2018).

Live-action role-playing (LARP) emerged in the 1980s and it emphasizes improvisation and social interaction. It has since formalized into structured events like *Nordic LARP*, gaining international recognition (Hitchens & Drucken, 2007). LARP communities organize local events and larger conventions that foster global collaboration (Bowman, 2010; Mochocki, 2021).

The popularity of Actual Play (AP) content in the 2010s brought RPGs to wider audiences, with shows like *Critical Role* and *The Adventure Zone* influencing both game design and culture (Orr et al., 2018). AP content fosters live audience interaction through platforms like Twitch, building strong fan communities on social media and forums (Chalk, 2022; Jones, 2021).

Main characteristics of different forms of role-playing games (RPGs) and related media, including Tabletop RPGs (TRPGs), Computer RPGs (CRPGs), Massively Multiplayer Online RPGs (MMORPGs), Live Action Role-Playing (LARP), and Actual Play (AP) are:

- **Primary Media:** TRPGs use analog objects (tables, rulebooks, dice, figurines). CRPGs use computers and consoles. MMORPGs operate on online platforms. LARP involves physical performance using props and costumes. AP uses digital platforms (YouTube, Twitch, and podcasts).
- **Participation:** TRPGs involve direct player interactions. CRPGs typically pit players against computers. MMORPGs facilitate player interaction in the online world. LARP features physical participant interactions. AP focuses on audience observations.
- **Role of Narrative:** TRPGs emphasize collective storytelling. The CRPGs have predetermined narratives. MMORPGs blend player-created and predetermined stories. LARP narratives develop through physical interactions. AP shares narratives directly with the audience.
- **Commodification:** TRPGs andLARPs have low to moderate commodification. CRPGs are moderately commodified. MMORPGs are highly commodified (subscriptions and micro-transactions). AP commodification varies but often involves content monetization.
- **Examples:** TRPGs: “*Dungeons & Dragons*,” “*Pathfinder*.” CRPGs: “*Baldur’s Gate*,” “*Fallout*.” MMORPG: “*World of Warcraft*.” LARP: “*Vampire: The Masquerade*,” “*NERO*.” AP: “*Critical Role*,” “*The Adventure Zone*.”
- **Community Engagement:** TRPGs involve local groups. CRPGs have online communities. MMORPGs feature guilds and clans. LARP

communities organize local events. APs engage in online fanbases.

- **Main Goals:** TRPGs: fun, creativity, and social interaction. CRPGs: Entertainment and task completion. MMORPGs: Social interaction and in-game achievements. LARPs: fun, physical interaction, and performance. APs: entertainment, audience engagement, and storytelling.
- **Interaction with Other Media:** All RPG forms interact with literature, comics, and movies. Additionally, CRPGs, MMORPGs, LARP, and AP are connected to TRPGs, whereas MMORPGs are also related to CRPGs.

Commodification of RPGs

Over the decades, the industry has grown in size and diversity, encompassing tabletop RPGs, live-action role-playing (LARP), and digital RPGs.

Overview of the RPG Industry's worth (Picard, 2008; Chalk, 2022)

- **1970s to 1980s:** The RPG industry began with a modest market primarily driven by the success of D&D. By the late 1980s, the industry was estimated to be worth approximately US\$ 100 million. This period witnessed a boom in RPG popularity, with the emergence of many new systems and expansions.
- **1990s:** The market continued to grow, reaching approximately \$200 million at the end of the decade. This era introduced diverse genres and systems, including Vampire, Masquerade, and GURPS.
- **2000s:** The RPG industry faced challenges with the rise of video games but still managed to grow, with estimates placing the market value at around \$300 million. The introduction of the d20 System and the Open Game License (OGL) has allowed for greater creativity and expansion within the industry.
- **The 2010s:** The market saw a resurgence, particularly with the release of the 5th Edition of D&D in 2014, which attracted a new generation of players. By the end of the decade, the RPG industry was valued at approximately \$700 million, with tabletop RPGs gaining popularity through streaming platforms and social media.
- **The 2020s:** Recent estimates suggest that the RPG industry is worth more than US\$ 1 billion. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital platforms for RPG, thereby further expanding the market. The success of related media such as films and video games based on RPGs has also contributed to this growth.

Even though there are examples of dozens of RPGs and their commodifications, here is a short list of the most popular:

1. **Dungeons & Dragons** is a tabletop RPG with various connected media, including movies such as *Dungeons & Dragons* (2000) and *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* (2023), and TV shows such as the animated *Dungeons & Dragons* series (1983-1985) and *The Legend of*

- Vox Machina* (2022-present). The franchise also includes numerous novels, such as the *Dragonlance* series, various comics published by IDW Publishing, and a wide range of merchandise, such as miniatures, dice, and tabletop accessories.
2. **Final Fantasy** is a video game series that has expanded into other media. This includes movies such as *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (2001), *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (2005), and the TV show *Final Fantasy: Unlimited* (2001-2002). The series also includes novels such as *Final Fantasy VII: On the Way to a Smile*, manga adaptations such as *Final Fantasy VII*, and a variety of merchandise, including action figures, clothing, and collectibles.
 3. **The Witcher** originated as a book series and later became a series of video games. Its connected media include *The Witcher* Netflix series (2019-present), board games like *The Witcher: The Board Game* and *The Witcher: Card Game*, and the original books by Andrzej Sapkowski, including *The Last Wish* and *Sword of Destiny*. Additionally, there are graphic novels and comic adaptations, along with a range of merchandise, such as collectibles, clothing, and themed board games.
 4. **World of Warcraft** is an MMORPG with several media outlets. This includes the movie *Warcraft* (2016) and board and card games such as *World of Warcraft: The Board Game* (2005) with its expansions, *World of Warcraft TCG*, *World of Warcraft Adventure Game*, *Wrath of the Lich King Board Game*, and *Small World of Warcraft*. The franchise also features numerous novels, such as *Warcraft: The Last Guardian* and the *World of Warcraft: Chronicle* series, as well as graphic novels like *the World of Warcraft: Curse of the Worgen* and *The Sunwell Trilogy*. Merchandise includes action figures, apparel, collectibles, and themed accessories.

Critical Role: Actual Play phenomena

Critical Role is a highly popular actual play (AP) stream that features a cast of experienced voice actors engaging in weekly *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) gameplay sessions, overseen by Matthew Mercer as the Dungeon Master. The show has gained immense popularity because of its intricate storytelling, compelling characteristics, and actors' skillful improvisation and acting abilities. Critical Role has successfully completed two long-running campaigns and has embarked on a third, all set within the richly detailed fictional world of Exandria created by Mercer. The series airs weekly, with occasional breaks, and each stream typically lasts between three and four hours (Chalk, 2022).

The success of Critical Role extends beyond engaging with content. The show has a massive following, with approximately 33,000 active Twitch subscriptions showing its significant cultural impact within the actual play genre. The series has also leveraged the popularity and talent of its performers, including well-known voice and TV actors, to deliver charismatic and entertaining gameplay productions.

The influence of its Critical Role is further highlighted by its integration into an economy of geek celebrities, with Matthew Mercer emerging as a prominent figure in the Dungeons & Dragons community, serving as an unofficial spokesperson for the game and garnering mainstream press coverage (Marsham, 2020).

Critical Role's engagement with its audience is a key aspect of its success. While episodes are pre-recorded, they are broadcast "live" during the show's scheduled streaming slot, allowing for real-time interaction with thousands of fans, known as "Critters." The show's participatory nature includes chat rooms alongside the stream where viewers can react to and discuss the action as it unfolds. Professional moderators are employed to maintain a positive environment, manage viewer interactions, enhance the overall viewer experience, and foster a sense of community among fans (Chalk, 2022). Critical Role stands out as a giant in the actual play space, setting a high standard for other AP series to aspire to. Its blend of captivating storytelling, talented performers, and interactive engagement with fans has solidified its position as a leading force in the actual play genre, influencing both the TRPG industry and the broader geek cultural landscape (Burton, 2021).

In Burton's (2021) PhD thesis on "Identity Negotiation and Resistance in Dungeons and Dragons Liveshow Critical Role," the concept of performer identity is explored within the context of the Critical Role play series. In this thesis, performer identity refers to the unique role that individuals, particularly players and cast members of the show, adopt when engaging in live-streamed tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs), such as Dungeons and Dragons. In the context of Critical Role, performers take on multiple roles simultaneously. They not only embody their in-game characters (personas), but also actively engage with the audience, consider narrative arcs, and make decisions that impact the overall storytelling experience. Performer identity encompasses the creative and interactive aspects of playing TTRPGs in a live-streamed format, in which the actions and choices of players have immediate consequences and feedback from the audience (Burton, 2021).

Scholars have explored the complex relationship between fans and the media industry, highlighting the ways in which convergence has blurred the lines between producers and consumers (McNutt, 2018). In the case of Critical Role, producers have actively encouraged fan engagement by leveraging social media platforms and fan events to foster a sense of community and shared investment in the narrative (McNutt, 2018). This strategy aligns with the experience economy, where branded experiences and their mediation on social media become central to consumption, as fans are invited to immerse themselves in a world of Critical Role (Kohnen, 2020).

While Critical Role, a popular Dungeons & Dragons livestream, may initially appear to be grassroots, an amateur production, a closer examination reveals that it is, in fact, a highly professional, commodified enterprise (Chalk, 2022). Two key characteristics of the Critical Role that exemplify this are the involvement of professional voice actors as the main performers and the deliberate, structured nature of production.

Contrary to the perception of a Critical Role as the work of a group of casual players, the cast is composed of experienced, accomplished voice actors, many of

whom have extensive credits in the voice acting industry. This professional pedigree underscores the show's commercial aspirations and position as a commodified media product rather than a purely amateur endeavor. The cast's status as a professional performer also shapes the audience's engagement with the show, as they are not merely watching a group of friends playing a game, but rather a carefully crafted performance. On the other hand, a recent interview with Critical role cast members discovers that „scripting“ of AP depends on its definition: on one side, TRPG is a fully scripted experience because of the Dungeon Master who prepares an adventure for players; on the other side, Critical role has a crew for production of the show.

Furthermore, a Critical Role is not simply a spontaneous gameplay session, but a meticulously planned, edited, and produced performance (Chalk, 2022). As Burton (2021) notes, Critical Role is a performative act that is planned, edited, and produced. This level of production value and intentionality behind the show's creation further distances it from the realm of amateur, grassroots gameplay and firmly positions it as a commodified media product. The combination of professional performers and a deliberate, structured production process demonstrates that Critical Role is not merely an amateur game session, but rather a carefully crafted, commodified entertainment product. They have podcasts, live events, books, adventure scenarios, set of dice, t-shirts, the tv show „Legends of Vox Machina“ on Amazon Prime, and their own channels on Youtube, Twitch, etc. Also, as Chalk (2022) stated, Critical role has other content creators in the audience which produces their opinions, theories and „what if“ analysis of every episode.

The net worth of a Critical Role as a brand and company has grown significantly from 2015 to 2024. In 2014, Critical Role began as a web series with voice actors playing Dungeons and Dragons, initially functioning as a passion project with little financial backing (Sorbello, 2024). The creation of Critical Role Productions LLC in 2015 marked its transition into a business, with early revenue coming mainly from Twitch and small sponsorships. By 2018, launching their own Twitch and YouTube channels had significantly boosted visibility and revenue, with substantial income from ads and subscriptions. A pivotal moment came in 2019 with the Kickstarter campaign for The Legend of Vox Machina, which raised over \$11.3 million, highlighting the brand's financial potential and community support. In 2021, a leak revealed that Critical Role earned around \$9.6 million from Twitch between September 2019 and September 2021, not including merchandise sales or sponsorships, indicating much higher total earnings (Sorbello, 2024). Following the success of The Legend of Vox Machina on Amazon Prime Video, the brand continued to expand between 2022 and 2024, with a new animated series signaling ongoing growth and profitability.

World of Warcraft: A networked imagination

World of Warcraft, a massive multiplayer online role-playing game developed by Blizzard Entertainment, has not only captivated millions of players worldwide with its expansive and immersive gameplay, but has also transcended the boundaries of the digital space, converging with various other media products (Ong et al., 2015;

Bainbridge, 2010; Thomas & Brown, 2009; Qian, 2011). This section explores the ways in which World of Warcraft intersects with and influences different forms of media, showcasing its ability to create a networked imagination and shared cultural experience that extends beyond the confines of the game.

One of the primary ways in which World of Warcraft has converged with other media is through strong social components. The game has been described as a “third place” for informal sociability, providing a virtual space for players to engage in social interaction, form relationships, and build communities beyond their physical workplaces and homes (Vukojević & Španović, 2023). The collaborative nature of the game, in which players must exchange information and work together in real time to progress, has fostered a sense of camaraderie and belonging to the player base. These social connections and shared experiences have led to the emergence of a “networked imagination,” where physically disconnected players can collectively create and participate in a mutually constituted reality (Thomas & Brown, 2009).

This networked imagination has manifested in various forms, such as the tradition of players gathering around a slain boss monster to pose for a group photograph and capture a moment of triumph that transcends the digital world. Furthermore, players often speak of their guilds, or in-game social groups, as a “home” or “family,” even though they may have never met their guildmates in person (Vukojević & Španović, 2023).

The convergence of World of Warcraft with other media is also evident in the manner in which the game inspired and influenced various forms of content creation. The vast and richly detailed world of Warcraft has become a source of inspiration for writers, artists, and filmmakers, who have adapted and expanded upon the game’s lore and characters in the form of novels, comic books, and even feature films. Moreover, the economic systems, social structures, and communication challenges of games have been the subject of academic study, with researchers examining how virtual worlds can serve as cultural models for understanding larger societal and cultural phenomena (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; Thomas & Brown, 2009).

The main conclusion of the paper “Interplay Between Media and Player Engagement: A Study of Media’s Effect on World of Warcraft Gaming Experience” is that the specific version of World of Warcraft (WoW) significantly influences the development of the gaming experience, particularly in terms of communication and problem-solving among players (Vukojević & Španović, 2023). Classic WoW directed players towards more interaction and collaboration, fostering a sense of community regardless of personal preferences and state of play. In contrast, Modern WoW offers a more flexible approach, allowing players to choose when and how they engage in communication, thus reflecting the evolving nature of in-game social dynamics over time.

World of Warcraft’s massive success has significantly impacted the gaming industry, proving the commercial viability of the MMORPG genre and inspiring other developers (Brown, 2017; Qian, 2011). However, its popularity has raised concerns about the negative effects of excessive gameplay, such as addiction and strained relationships (Brown, 2017), prompting discussions on gaming’s impact on mental

health, especially among adolescents (Kuss, 2013; Scott & Porter-Armstrong, 2013).

From 2004 to 2010, WoW grew rapidly, reaching over 10 million subscribers by 2008 and peaking at 12 million in 2010. By 2017, it had generated \$9.23 billion in revenue, significantly boosting Blizzard's earnings (Statista, 2023). Although subscriber numbers declined to 5.6 million by 2015, WoW remained the most-subscribed MMORPG. In 2018 and 2019, Blizzard reported revenues of \$1.73 billion and \$1.74 billion, with WoW contributing substantially through expansions and in-game purchases.

The COVID-19 pandemic renewed interest in gaming, increasing WoW subscriptions by the end of 2020. In 2022, Blizzard's revenue reached \$2.01 billion, with WoW playing a major role, particularly after the launch of Dragonflight. In the first half of 2023, WoW contributed an estimated \$450-675 million to Blizzard's \$1.5 billion revenue (Statista, 2023).

Conclusion

The development of RPGs from the 1970s to the present has been significantly shaped by media convergence, resulting in a dynamic interplay between commodification and community participation. This process has led to the diversification of RPG forms, including tabletop RPGs (TRPGs), Computer RPGs (CRPGs), massive multiplayer online RPGs (MMORPGs), Live Action Role-Playing (LARP), and Actual Play (AP). Each form has unique characteristics in terms of the primary media, participation, narrative focus, and levels of commodification.

While the commercialization of RPGs has increased through these convergences, the RPG subculture has simultaneously fostered prosumerism, striving to preserve the participative and creative aspects of the genre. This is evident in the way communities engage with and shape their gaming experiences, from modding in CRPGs to the creation of fan content on AP shows.

Case studies of Critical Role and World of Warcraft illustrate how different RPG forms have leveraged media convergence to expand their reach and impact. Critical Role, for instance, has transformed from a simple gameplay stream into a multi-media franchise, while maintaining a strong connection with its community. World of Warcraft demonstrates how MMORPGs can foster a "networked imagination" that extends beyond the game itself, influencing various forms of media and cultural productions.

However, the increasing commodification of RPGs, particularly in digital formats such as MMORPGs, has led to tensions between commercial interests and community-driven aspects of gaming. This is exemplified by the evolution of World of Warcraft, where newer versions have intensified in-game commodification at the expense of community-building.

The evolution of RPGs reflects broader trends in media convergence and the digital culture. As commodification has increased, the participatory nature of RPG communities continues to play a crucial role in shaping genre development.

The future of RPGs will likely continue to be characterized by a balance between commercial interests and community-driven creativity, as the genre adapts to new technologies and changes player expectations.

This hypothesis is largely supported by the evolution of RPGs over the past five decades. Indeed, this genre has been significantly influenced by media convergence, resulting in a diverse array of RPG forms that span from traditional tabletop games to digital platforms and live performances. Each of these forms - TRPGs, CRPGs, MMORPGs, LARP, and AP - demonstrates unique characteristics in terms of media use, participation, narrative focus, and levels of commodification, yet they all share core elements of role-playing and storytelling.

The interplay between commodification and community participation was evident across all RPG forms. As RPGs have become more commercialized, particularly in digital formats such as MMORPGs and streaming content such as Actual Play shows, there has been a simultaneous increase in prosumer activities. Communities have been actively engaged in creating content, modifying games, and shaping narratives, thereby preserving the participatory essence of RPGs.

Finally, based on the experience of authors and the results of this study, there are some possible future directions for RPG development.

Increased integration of immersive technologies: As virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies continue to advance, RPGs may incorporate these elements to create more immersive gaming experiences. This could lead to a new form of RPG that blends the physicality of LARP with the digital aspects of MMORPGs.

AI-driven storytelling and NPCs: Artificial intelligence can be used to create more dynamic and responsive non-player characters (NPCs) and storylines, allowing for truly personalized gaming experiences that adapt to individual player choices and preferences.

Cross-platform convergence: Future RPGs may seamlessly integrate different forms of play, allowing players to transition between tabletop, digital, and live-action elements within the same game world or campaign.

Enhanced social features: Building on the success of the community-driven aspects of current RPGs, future games may incorporate more sophisticated social features that facilitate deeper player interactions and collaborative storytelling.

Expansion of Actual Play content: The popularity of AP shows may lead to more professional, high-production-value content that blurs the lines between gaming and traditional entertainment.

Adaptive learning systems: RPGs can incorporate machine learning to tailor game difficulty, pacing, and content to individual players' skills and preferences, thereby ensuring a more engaging experience at all skill levels.

References

- Barton, M., & Stacks, S. (2019). *Dungeons and desktops: The history of computer role-playing games*. CRC Press.
- Booth, P. (2015). *Game Play: Paratextuality in contemporary Board Games*. Bloomsbury Academic: New York.
- Bowman, S. L. (2010). *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems and Explore Identity*. McFarland & Co.
- Brown, J. (2017). World of Worry: Examining the dark side of World of Warcraft. *Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers*, 6(1), 111-115. <https://doi.org/10.1109/mce.2016.2614550>
- Brunette, T. (2015). Call of Cthulhu and Vampire: the Masquerade: invocation, spatiality, and ritual transcendence in two tabletop role-playing games. <https://mountainscholar.org/handle/10217/170313>
- Burton, A. (2021). *Identity Negotiation and Resistance in Dungeons and Dragons Liveshow Critical Role*. University of California, USA. PhD Thesis.
- Byers, A., & Crocco, F. (2016). *The Role-Playing Society: Essays on the Cultural Influence of RPGs*. McFarland & Co.
- Chalk, A. (2022). *Actual Play Critical Role*. PhD Dissertation.
- Cragoe, N G. (2016). *RPG Mythos*. SAGE Publishing, 11(6), 583-607. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015574195>
- Deterding, S., & Zagal, J. (2018). *Role-playing game studies: Transmedia foundations*. Routledge.
- Feng, Y., Wang, Z., Yunan, P., & Yang, S. (2020). Bibliometrics-Based Review of the Media Convergence Research Trend in China: 2008 –2018. <https://doi.org/10.1109/iccst50977.2020.00024>
- Gygax, G., & Arneson, D. (1974). *Dungeons & Dragons*. TSR.
- Hitchens, M., & Drucken, T. (2007). The many faces of role-playing games. *Journal of Role-Playing*.
- Jansom, A., & Pongsakornrunsilp, S. (2021). How Instagram Influencers Affect the Value Perception of Thai Millennial Followers and Purchasing Intention of Luxury Fashion for Sustainable Marketing. *Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute*, 13(15), 8572-8572. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13158572>
- Jones, S. (2021). *Watch Us Roll: Essays on Actual Play and Performance in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*. McFarland & Co.
- Kohnen, M E S. (2020). The experience economy of TV promotion at San Diego Comic-Con. *SAGE Publishing*, 24(1), 157-176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877920935888>
- Kuss, D J. (2013). *Internet gaming addiction: current perspectives*. Dove Medical Press, 125-125. <https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s39476>
- Lawson-Borders, G. (2003). Integrating new media and old media: Seven observations of convergence as a strategy for best practices in media organizations. *Taylor & Francis*, 5(2), 91-99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14241270309390023>

- Leparoux, M., Minier, P., & Anand, A. (2019). The online influencers strategies and their impact on consumers' decision process. *Saint Petersburg State University*, 18(3), 419-447. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu08.2019.305>
- Maravić, M. (2022). *Totalna istorija video igara*. Clío: Beograd.
- Marsham, L. (2020). *The World of Critical Role: The History Behind the Epic Fantasy*. Ten Speed Press. New York.
- McNutt, M. (2018). Social TV fandom and the media industries. *Organization for Transformative Works*, 26. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1504>
- Mochocki, M. (2021). *Role-Play as a Heritage Practice: Historical Larp, Tabletop RPG and Reenactment*. Routledge.
- Morewedge, C K., Monga, A., Palmatier, R W., Shu, S B., & Small, D A. (2020). Evolution of Consumption: A Psychological Ownership Framework. *SAGE Publishing*, 85(1), 196-218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242920957007>
- Orr, et al. (2018). A qualitative exploration of the perceived social benefits of playing tabletop role-playing games among young adults. *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 10.
- Picard, M. (2008). *Video Games and Their Relationship with Other Media*. Retrieved from www.ludicine.ca/sites/ludicine.ca/files/PICARD%20-%20Video%20Games%20and%20Their%20Relationship%20with%20Other%20Media.pdf, 25.08.2024.
- Qian, G. (2011, January 1). *MMORPGs: The Perspective from Psychology*. *Trans Tech Publications*, 460-461, 388-393. <https://doi.org/10.4028/www.scientific.net/kem.460-461.388>
- Scott, J., & Porter-Armstrong, A. (2013). *Impact of Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games upon the Psychosocial Well-Being of Adolescents and Young Adults: Reviewing the Evidence*. *Hindawi Publishing Corporation*, 2013, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/464685>
- Sorbello, A. (2024). *Matthew Mercer – Net Worth, Wife, Critical Role*. Retrieved from <https://www.astrogrowth.com/blog/matthew-mercero/>, 22.08.2024.
- Stankevich, A. (2017). *Explaining the Consumer Decision-Making Process: Critical Literature Review*. , 2(6), 7-14. <https://doi.org/10.18775/jibrm.1849-8558.2015.26.3001>
- Statista (2023). *Net revenue generated by Blizzard Entertainment from 2007 to 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/269664/blizzards-annual-revenue/>, 24.08.2024.
- Verhoef, P C., Broekhuizen, T., Bart, Y., Bhattacharya, A., Dong, J Q., Fabian, N E., & Haenlein, M. (2021). Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. *Elsevier BV*, 122, 889-901. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.022>
- Vukojević, B., Španović, M. (2023). *Interplay between Media and Player Engagement: A Study of Media's Effect on the World of Warcraft Gaming Experience*. *Društvene i humanističke studije, Journal of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Tuzla*, vol. 8, br. 3 (24), str. 693-712.
- White, et al. (2018). *International Journal of Role-Playing*, Issue 10.

Xuerui, C. (2022). Strategy Exploration for Cultural Programs in Media Convergence Era from the Analysis of Everlasting Classics. , 5(8). <https://doi.org/10.25236/ajhss.2022.050806>

Medijske konvergencije igara igranja uloga (1974-2024): od participacije ka komodifikaciji i nazad

Borislav Vukojević, viši asistent, Fakultet političkih nauka Univerzitet u Banjoj Luci;
Luci; Dalibor Savić, vanredni profesor, Fakultet političkih nauka Univerzitet u Banjoj Luci

Apstrakt

U radu se razmatra uticaj medijskih konvergencija na evoluciju igara igranja uloga (eng. Role-playing Games - RPG) u periodu od početka 1970-ih do danas. Analitički fokus istraživanja usmjeren je na dinamiku između participacije (zajednica) igrača i procesa komodifikacije pomenutog žanra. U tom kontekstu, izdvajaju se specifične faze u razvoju RPG-a, od stonih igara igranja uloga (eng. tabletop role-playing games – TRPGs), klasičnih video igara igranja uloga (eng. computer role-playing games - CRPGs), masivnih onlajn igara igranja uloga za više igrača (eng. massively multiplayer online role-playing games - MMORPGs), do akcionog igranja uloga uživo (live action role-playing- LARP) i stvarne igre (eng. actual play – AP). Pri tome se ukazuje na sličnosti i razlike između pomenutih formi, njihove međusobne konvergencije, kao i konvergencije sa drugim analognim i digitalnim medijima (poput knjige, stripa, televizije, filma i podkasta). Posebno se razmatra fenomen prozumerizma u RPG potkulturi, tj. specifična interakcija između sadržaja koje nudi industrija zabave i težnji RPG zajednica da održe participative i kreativne aspekte žanra. Istraživanje je zasnovano na dijahronijskom poređenju specifičnih faza u razvoju RPG žanra, odnosno analizi dominantnih medijskih narativa o aktuelnim trendovima u RPG potkulturi. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju da su medijske konvergencije unutar RPG žanra često vodile ka komodifikaciji, ali da unutar RPG potkulture i dalje postoji potencijal za očuvanje i dalji razvoj participativnih formi igara uloga. Rad završava sa pregledom mogućih pravaca razvoja RPG žanra i zaključcima o važnosti očuvanja participativnih elemenata u digitalnom medijskom ekosistemu.

Ključne riječi: RPG, medijske konvergencije, Critical role, World of Warcraft, komodifikacija

Received: 2nd September 2024

Revision received: 24th September 2024

Accepted: 10th October 2024

Artificial Intelligence in the Media in Serbia: When Satire Isn't Funny¹

Milica Kulić²³, Ph.D.

Associate professor, Faculty of Political Sciences, University in Belgrade

Abstract

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a daily routine in newsrooms. AI appears as an essential tool in journalists' professional routines, aiding in faster work processes, automatic text generation, and assisting with repetitive tasks. However, the use of AI in the media provides fertile ground for various types of abuse, settling scores with dissenters, and falls under the category of "weaponized defamation."

The Serbian government is committed to keeping pace with the development and application of AI in various sectors. However, this commitment is not accompanied by an adequate legal framework when it comes to the media. Currently, there is no specific law regulating this field, leaving those affected by existing practices to rely on related legislation, which neither covers all potential violations in this area nor prevents further manipulation.

This paper analyzes the legal framework for regulating AI in the media, as well as the potential for self-regulation. The analysis is based on a case study in which media mogul Željko Mitrović published a "satirical video" on his X platform, followed by its broadcast in the news programs of Pink Television. The video, which was a deepfake generated using artificial intelligence, mocked opposition representatives. The paper also examines the first lawsuit in which opposition representative Dragan Djilas won against Željko Mitrović and Pink Television, based on the AI-generated video content that was broadcast on television. The scope of this ruling highlights both the possibilities and shortcomings of the legal framework in this area within the Serbian media landscape.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, media, legal framework, self-regulation, Serbia

Artificial Intelligence in the Media in Serbia: When Satire Isn't Funny

Introduction

The threatened child stared at the reader. Deep, dark eyes, a grimy face, and a fair wisp on the left cheek provoked shock and discomfort. "It is a picture that

¹ This paper was presented at the International Scientific Conference *Media and Challenges of the Modern Society*, held on May 30–31, 2024, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.

² Corresponding author: milica.kulic@fpn.bg.ac.rs

³ ORCID: 0000-0002-3339-9092

AI created to help illustrate my text on the implementation of the Amber Alert in Serbia, which aims to help locate lost or kidnapped children,” said Slavica Vujanac, editor of the local portal VAmmedia. “I noted below that the photo was created by AI. Some newsrooms don’t permit the use of AI-generated images, but as a media entrepreneur, I cannot pretend it doesn’t exist. I use it and label it transparently,” Vujanac explained.

A growing number of media outlets are using artificial intelligence (AI) in the creation of media content (Brenner, 2018). Some have even announced plans to replace journalists, or at least part of their daily routines, with AI (Chan-Omsted, 2019; Simon, 2024). Scholars often point to 2014 as a pivotal moment when the Los Angeles Times introduced “Quakebot” to generate content for the paper (Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021, 247). In 2015, the Associated Press implemented automated journalism to produce financial reports following Apple’s quarterly figures (Graefe, 2016). NPR’s Planet Money podcast employed AI to write news stories, The New York Times invited readers to distinguish between human - and AI-written articles, and even The Daily Show humorously used AI to address certain topics (Graefe, 2016: 10). Over the last decade, numerous examples have emerged from various parts of the media sector, showing how AI is being used to create content that was previously the exclusive domain of human journalists

AI is now applied across multiple sectors of media production, including content creation, data mining, news dissemination, and content optimization (Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021: 246). For journalists, the most alarming aspect may be its role in content production, which challenges both the identity and ideology of the profession (Deuze, 2005). The possibility of robots replacing journalists (Miroshnichenko, 2018) raises fundamental questions about the future of the profession and the role of human journalists. AI-generated content is not limited to print and online media, where its integration is more straightforward, but extends to electronic media, creating opportunities for both the application and violation of professional norms. Some scholars have questioned whether technology is becoming the new gatekeeper of news (Nechushtai & Lewis, 2019), while others have raised concerns about whose interests are being prioritized (Simon, 2024) and the ethical implications of transparency in content production (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2017; see also Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021).

The increasing use of AI TV anchors is becoming a daily occurrence in news programs worldwide. This trend began with the introduction of the first AI TV anchor on the Chinese TV channel Xinhua in 2018, followed by the appearance of Feda on a Kuwaiti news program and Ana on the Montenegrin portal Dan in 2023. In parallel, in November 2023, media mogul Željko Mitrović announced a new satirical TV show generated by AI. This show, broadcast on the pro-government TV Pink, a channel with a national license, was focused on shaming the opposition, blurring the line between real and fabricated content. The AI generated video falls into the “weaponized defamation category” (Surčulija Milojević, 2018: 99).

According to the Digital Rights Annual Report, digital rights violations in Serbia became “more severe” in 2023, with numerous cases of hate speech, breaches

of private data, and discriminatory rhetoric. Journalists and activists faced an increasing number of threats and insults (BIRN, 2023: 110). Freedom House ranked Serbia's digital environment as free but noted the existence of "pro-government news sites, some of which are connected to the ruling party, that engage in disinformation campaigns" (Freedom House, 2023). The report also highlighted the use of paid online propagandists, surveillance infrastructure, and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP lawsuits) (Freedom House, 2023; see also BIRN, 2023). The Digital Rights Violations Annual Report further emphasized the unethical use of AI, particularly deepfakes, to mislead and spread disinformation.

Notable examples involved opposition representatives whose remarks were misrepresented by media mogul and owner of TV Pink Željko Mitrović. Mitrović posted a deepfake video on the X platform, which later aired on his private, pro-government TV Pink's news program. Although the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media claimed that the media bears responsibility, no steps were taken to hold Mitrović accountable (similarly, in the case of opposition representative Savo Manojlović, who also sought a response from REM, no significant measures were taken). Dragan Djilas subsequently sued both Mitrović and TV Pink, demanding the removal of the video and seeking a court order to prevent its further broadcasting. In July 2024, the court temporarily banned the broadcast of the controversial content (case 1635/23, July 11, 2024), but the video remains on Mitrović's account on the X platform (accessed on September 12, 2024). This lawsuit marked the first high-level private case in Serbia over the alleged misuse of AI. However, this decision was made under the Law on personal data protection, as no specific legislation addressing artificial intelligence exists.

This paper aims to analyze the use of AI in Serbian media, highlighting its potential for abuse within the country's highly polarized media landscape. The study will focus on the lack of a regulatory framework for AI, identify steps in the government's strategy for regulating AI in the media production, and examine the misuse of existing legal frameworks through the example of an AI-generated satirical program broadcast as part of TV Pink's news segment. Additionally, this paper will explore the challenges of self-regulation in the AI-driven media sector within a polarized media environment, where some outlets disregard the Code of Ethics, let alone address the need for updates to accommodate AI.

Theoretical framework

When discussing artificial intelligence (AI) in content production, scholarly attention frequently centers on automated journalism (AJ) within professional routines. A substantial body of literature positions AI as a tool that can enhance journalistic productivity, facilitate the acquisition of new skills, and allocate more time for creative endeavors (Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021). Many studies focus on "using software or algorithms to automatically generate news stories without human intervention" (Greafe, 2016: 9). This perspective underscores the concept of operation "without human intervention" (Ali & Hassoun, 2019), highlighting

AI's role in automating repetitive tasks within newsrooms. However, this viewpoint may overlook the broader implications of AI's impact on editorial, political, and economic agendas. AI is often seen merely as a tool for task automation, rather than a transformative force that could influence news content and journalism practices.

AI has assumed a significant role in professional journalism, playing a “transformative role in reshaping news work, from editorial to the business side” (Simon, 2024). Its function extends beyond mere task automation to include potential uses in misleading the audience (Shao et al., 2017). This study aims to explore the context and framework of potential misleading applications of AI and assess whether they can be addressed through legal frameworks or self-regulation.

In an effort to bolster media resilience and “support journalists in their execution of this societal and democratic role” (European Commission [EC], 2023, 5), the Council of Europe has provided Guidelines for the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence (CoE, 2023). The CoE offers a broad definition of AI in the media, describing it as a system “that uses computational methods derived from statistics or other mathematical techniques and that generates text, sound, image, or other content or either assists or replaces human decision-making” (CoE, 2023: 7). Additionally, the CoE distinguishes between general AI and journalistic AI, defining the latter as “artificial intelligence systems directly related to the business or practice of regularly producing information about contemporary affairs of public interest and importance, including the research and investigation tasks that underpin journalistic outputs” (CoE, 2023: 7). The Council of Europe emphasizes that states “should encourage independent regulatory authorities, news media self-regulatory bodies, or standard-setting bodies to help news organizations develop procurement guidelines, making available standard clauses for the responsible procurement of journalistic AI systems” (CoE, 2023: 23). Furthermore, it highlights the importance of self-regulation to ensure transparency and accountability (Ibid).

In recent years, the European Union has committed to establishing a legal framework for the use of AI in the media. The EU's AI Act aims to “provide measures to guarantee the safety and fundamental rights of people and businesses with respect to AI” (AI Act, 2024). Through its guidance and legal obligations, the EU addresses the “dark side” of AI, prohibiting manipulations and abuses, particularly those affecting vulnerable groups. The Act notes that “AI systems could be influenced by inherent biases that may gradually increase and perpetuate existing discrimination, particularly against persons belonging to certain vulnerable groups, including racial or ethnic groups” (Ibid, article 67).

Serbia is working to align its legal framework with European standards on AI. The Republic of Serbia participated in drafting UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (UNESCO, 2021) and has incorporated it into its Guidelines (Serbia Government Guidelines). In 2019, the Serbian Government adopted the Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025. This strategy aims to establish a foundation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by focusing on education, technology development, and the market and business sectors (Strategy Gov RS, 2019). While the strategy did not specifically

address media, it provided a framework for digitalization in Serbia. The government's agenda was "ambitious," including plans to establish an AI Institute and adopt an Ethical Framework for Responsible AI Development. Despite significant progress, there remains a need for ongoing dialogue regarding the benefits and risks associated with rapidly advancing technology (Marković, 2023). The implementation of these goals has been delayed due to the absence of a legal framework. The public discussion on the Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in Serbia for the Period 2024-2030 is currently ongoing.

While Serbia's approach to AI development has not specifically addressed the media sector, the broader societal impacts of AI are acknowledged. Consequently, media producers and users, particularly in the electronic media sector, must adhere to existing legal documents such as the Public Information Law, Law on Electronic Media, Law on Public Service Broadcasting and Law on Personal Data protection. Additionally, the media landscape in Serbia is characterized by significant polarization, with some influential media outlets refusing to adhere to the Code of Ethics (Kulić, 2021) the process often relies on self-regulation. As a result, violations of professional norms or human rights in the media field through AI usage are currently addressed only through existing media laws.

According to the Digital Rights Violations Annual Report 2022-2023, fabricated content and fake accounts are prevalent in Serbia, with 12 documented cases. The report concludes that despite the government's Strategy and associated Ethical Standards, "no regulations specifically address AI-generated media content," leading to a "regulatory gap (that) leaves the field unchecked" (BIRN, 2023: 114).

Methodology

This case study focuses on the broadcasting of media content generated by artificial intelligence (deepfakes) on the central news program of the private TV station *TV Pink*. Owned by media mogul Željko Mitrović, the station has maintained a strong pro-government stance, aligning itself with various political regimes since its establishment in 1993. Despite receiving a national broadcasting license, *TV Pink* has a controversial reputation, with its content consisting largely of reality shows and news programs that frequently violate the *Code of Ethics*. Mitrović, who uses the station for personal promotion, often appears on its central news programs, turning the platform into a vehicle for his public relations and attacks on political opponents.

Mitrović has long experimented with AI technology, owning the *Pink Development Research Center*, which focuses on technological innovation. He is also known for using biased and fabricated content to shame opposition leaders, a core element of *TV Pink*'s news programming. However, the use of AI-generated deepfakes to target opposition figures represents a new and alarming development in both Mitrović's practice and the Serbian media landscape.

In April 2023, Mitrović introduced a satirical TV program titled *Don't Be Angry, Man*, borrowing the name from a children's game. The show used deepfake

technology to manipulate interviews of opposition leaders—Dragan Djilas, Marinika Tepić, Vuk Jeremić, Boris Tadić, Savo Manojlović, and Aleksandar Jovanović Ćuta—creating fabricated statements that were broadcast both on Mitrović’s *X* account and in *TV Pink*’s news program. The videos appeared genuine, as they were derived from actual interviews the opposition leaders had given to the media, but the content was entirely fabricated. The false statements reflected opinions contrary to the usual positions of these political figures, blending elements of truth with misleading information to deceive the audience (Wardle, 2020).

Discussion

For instance, in one deepfake, Vuk Jeremić is made to say, “I’m going alone in the next elections. I have no idea who I could collaborate with, so may God save us, and may Vučić help us”. Similarly, Dragan Djilas is falsely depicted stating, “I’m going to the elections with 10 political invalids, and I’m worried if Žeks [Mitrović], through his robots, will reveal who we really are” (Ibid). The most widely circulated video was a deepfake of Djilas on the prominent political TV program *Utisak Nedelje*, where he insults fellow opposition leaders, saying: “Ćuta hasn’t sobered up in months; that Sava Harvard pretender was torn apart by Žeks in a debate and hasn’t recovered. Lutovac doesn’t know where he is, and Aleksić doesn’t know who he is. Jeremić is terrified” (see more on Adjudicate of Higher Court in Belgrade 1635/23, July 11, 2024).

Although Mitrović labeled the content as part of his satirical show on his *X* account, there was no mention that the videos were generated by AI. On *X*, the satirical nature of the content might be inferred, but when these clips were broadcast on *TV Pink*’s central news program, no such context was provided. While the anchor briefly mentioned that the content was AI-generated, there were no on-screen indicators to inform viewers that the videos were deepfakes. This omission could easily mislead even attentive viewers into believing the fabricated content. The legal proceedings concerning the use of AI-generated deepfakes in Serbia underscore significant gaps in the regulatory framework governing artificial intelligence, particularly within the media landscape. In the case involving Dragan Djilas, the Higher Court initially ruled (Case 1635/23, November 17, 2023) that there was insufficient legal justification for a temporary injunction to remove the deepfake video from *TV Pink*’s broadcast. However, following an appeal by Djilas, the Court of Appeal (Case 859/24, March 20, 2024) ordered the Higher Court to reconsider its decision. Subsequently, on July 11, 2024, the Higher Court ruled in favor of forbidding *TV Pink* from further broadcasting or commenting on the video in any form. This decision was based on Serbia’s *Law on Personal Data Protection*, as the court determined that the video had unlawfully exploited Djilas’ voice and likeness, thereby violating his rights to personal data integrity and privacy. In addition, the Court found the breach of Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, regulating the right to protection of personal data.

While the court's ruling effectively halted the broadcasting of the AI-generated content on television, it did not extend to social media platforms, where the video continued to circulate freely. The Higher Court explicitly acknowledged in its decision (Case 1635/23, November 7, 2024) that Mitrović's *X* account, with over 81,600 followers, provided a significant platform for the continued dissemination of the deepfake. This legal gap is emblematic of the broader challenges in regulating AI-generated content on social media platforms, as existing laws concerning personal data protection were not designed to address the complexities introduced by AI. The ruling exposed the inadequacy of current Serbian legislation to regulate AI-driven media content, particularly in instances where such content is disseminated through digital channels that operate outside the traditional media landscape.

The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, at its fourth urgent session held on August 21, 2023, adopted the following statement:

“In light of the recently published footage on social media and in the announcements of PMU programs, featuring public figures whose statements have been processed using artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, we remind all media service providers that, pursuant to Article 47 of the Law on Electronic Media, they are obliged not to provide programming content that could exploit the gullibility of viewers and listeners, and that audiovisual content must not mislead the public regarding individuals, events, or phenomena depicted in the footage. This is especially pertinent for informational programs, which are primarily intended to inform media service users about current events, individuals, and phenomena based on facts, as well as to contribute to their interpretation and understanding. We emphasize that failure to comply with this legal provision may result in the initiation of procedures for the imposition of measures stipulated by the Law on Electronic Media”.

The Regulatory Authority added that the “presentation of content using artificial intelligence in other types of programs, such as entertainment, documentary, educational, and others, should include a conspicuous notice before, throughout, and at the end of the program indicating that the content was generated using artificial intelligence. In addition to displaying the notice as described, PMU has a legal obligation to prevent the misuse of personal data, including identity, which encompasses an individual's likeness or voice” (REM, 2023).

The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media referenced the Law on Electronic Media as the overarching legislation governing media, interpreting sections related to artificial intelligence (AI) in a somewhat broad manner. However, this body, as seen in the case of the complaint filed by opposition representative Savo Manojlović for similar reasons, did not impose any significant measures such as a ban on broadcasting. Simultaneously, the authority lacks jurisdiction over content that Mitrović broadcasts on social media platforms. In a nearly mocking manner, Mitrović publicly responded to the Regulatory Authority, effectively stating that they would not be able to halt his production of this and similar content.

“I believe that this prohibition not only pertains to the satire of the eccentric Žeks but also to the potential AI satire of Stevan Sremac, Branislav Nušić, and other free-

spirited individuals who, in various epochs, certainly alarmed and terrified many! Nevertheless, it doesn't matter; I have so many plans that such prohibitions only inspire me! Besides having developed technology that will be known to the world only in 3 to 6 months, I decided to respond to REM and Olivera Zekić in a way that should make them understand that no prohibition can impede the rapid advancement of technological TV and video AI revolution in which I am currently a global leader. So, if all of you are frightened, just send me to the Moon, as in this song, so you can relax in the ambiance of the Inquisition and the Middle Ages, because it is certainly better for us who definitely do not belong to this gloomy and repressive era.”

This case highlights the lack of specific regulatory frameworks designed to address the use of artificial intelligence in both traditional media and digital platforms. While general legal provisions such as personal data protection laws offer some recourse, they fall short of providing a comprehensive solution to the challenges posed by AI-generated content (The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) refers to the Law on Electronic Media, while the court refers to the Law on the Protection of Personal Data). The absence of tailored regulations leaves the Serbian political and social environment vulnerable to manipulation, where public figures can be subjected to humiliation, defamation, and disinformation campaigns through AI technologies. This regulatory vacuum creates an imbalance in the media ecosystem, where powerful media owners, such as Željko Mitrović, are able to weaponize AI tools for political or personal retaliation, with little to no accountability. The unchecked power of media owners, especially those with strong ties to political elites, further complicates the issue, as the lines between legitimate news content, satire, and outright disinformation become increasingly blurred.

Moreover, the lack of specific AI regulation in the Serbian media sphere is exacerbated by the country's polarized media environment. Media outlets aligned with the government, such as *TV Pink*, frequently operate with impunity, leveraging their platforms to attack political opponents without regard for journalistic ethics. This creates a dual problem: the absence of regulatory mechanisms to control AI misuse and the reluctance of certain influential media outlets to adhere to ethical standards in content production. While Serbia has implemented some strategic initiatives to foster AI development, such as the *Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence* and the associated *Ethical Standards for Responsible AI Use*, these frameworks primarily address the technological aspects of AI rather than its social, political, or ethical implications, particularly in the media content production.

The court's ruling that the AI-generated video did not qualify as satire, despite being presented as such, further underscores the complexities surrounding AI's role in the media. Satire, by its very nature, blurs the line between reality and fiction; however, AI-generated content, particularly deepfakes, introduces a new dimension of complexity. The court's decision, which was based on laws unrelated to media regulation, reveals the inadequacy of existing legal frameworks to address the nuanced challenges of AI in the media, particularly when it comes to distinguishing between legitimate satire and disinformation. The ruling points to a pressing need for legal reform that explicitly addresses the use of AI in the media production,

ensuring that both traditional and digital media are held accountable for their use of AI technologies.

In conclusion, the legal proceedings involving the use of AI-generated content in Serbia reveal significant deficiencies in the current regulatory landscape. The lack of specific legal frameworks for AI in the media, combined with the polarized and ethically compromised media environment, creates a situation where AI can be misused with little to no consequences. As AI technologies continue to advance and become more integrated into media production, the need for comprehensive legal frameworks that address the ethical, political, and social implications of AI-generated content becomes increasingly urgent. Without such frameworks, the potential for AI to be used as a tool for manipulation, disinformation, and political retaliation remains a serious threat to both media integrity and democratic governance.

Conclusion

Although the Serbian government is explicit in its intention to align with European regulations and even to lead in the regulation of artificial intelligence (AI), recognizing the Fifth Industrial Revolution as both a goal and an opportunity, the regulation of AI in the media does not align with these objectives. The case analyzed demonstrates that the regulation of AI in the media is not a defined goal; there is no clear legislation applicable in this area to address harm caused by malicious intent, or to prevent individuals from creating deepfake or other misleading content.

The lawsuit filed by Dragan Djilas against Željko Mitrović not only highlights the absence of legislation and strategies in the field of AI but also exposes the extent of abuses and the antagonism towards political opponents in this domain when clear regulations are lacking. It should be noted that the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) has commented on the controversial case, but without any effect on the media mogul's actions. This case exemplifies not only the regulatory void in the application of AI in the media but also the broader disarray in the media sector, which is highly politicized, polarized, and beyond the reach of controls and professional standards.

Self-regulation in this area also appears almost impossible—media organizations can internally establish their own regulations and align them with the Code of Journalists of Serbia. However, self-regulation in terms of professional solidarity and adherence to shared principles is also unfeasible, as it turns out that the very media organizations that do not recognize the Code are routinely violating it, thus evading other forms of regulation and remaining unpunished.

The aforementioned case indicates that despite the state's official commitment to follow the development of AI, individuals who become subjects of media abuse remain unprotected in this struggle. The individual analyzed carries symbolic significance and, as an opposition representative, has a specific manifestation and public profile, which renders the case symbolic. However, the extent of abuses in this area is incalculable, affecting not only citizens perceived as opponents or unsuitable

in any way but also any individual who could be a victim of deepfake media content. The absence of clear legal regulations renders the media landscape distinctly polluted and hazardous for all participants, whether willingly or unwillingly involved.

References

- AI ACT (2024). Shaping Europe's digital future. Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 AI Act | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu) Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Ali, W& Houssoun, M. (2019). Artificial intelligence and automated journalism: Contemporary challenges and new opportunities. *International Journal of Media, Journalism and Mass Communication* 5: 40–49
- BIRN (2023). Digital tights in a time of crisis: Authoritarianism, political tension and Weak legislation boost violations. . *Digital Rights Violations Annual Report 2022-2023* <https://birn.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/01-BIRN-Digital-Rights-Violations-Annual-Report-2022-2023.pdf> Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Brennen, J. et all. (2018). An industry-led debate: how UK media cover artificial intelligence. In Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. December 2018 report https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-12/Brennen_UK_Media_Coverage_of_AI_FINAL.pdf
- Chan-Olmsted, S. M. (2019). A Review of Artificial Intelligence Adoptions in the Media Industry. *International Journal on Media Management*, 21(3–4), 193–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2019.1695619>
- Council of Europe [CoE] (2017). Guidelines on the responsible implementation of artificial intelligence systems in journalism. November 30th, 2023 <https://rm.coe.int/cdmsi-2023-014-guidelines-on-the-responsible-implementation-of-artific/1680adb4c6> Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Diakopoulos, N (2011). A Functional Roadmap for Innovation in Computational Journalism. <http://www.nickdiakopoulos.com/2011/04/22/a-functional-roadmap-for-innovation-in-computational-journalism/>
- European Commission [EC] (2023) European approach to artificial intelligence <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/european-approach-artificial-intelligence> Accessed September 12th 2024
- Freedom House 2023, Freedom in the World, Serbia <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2023> Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Government of Serbia (2023) Ethical guidelines for development, implementation and use od robust and accountable artificial intelligence [tps://www.ai.gov.rs/extfile/en/471/Ethical%20guidelines%20for%20development%20implementation%20and%20use%20of%20robust%20and%20accountable%20AI.pdf](https://www.ai.gov.rs/extfile/en/471/Ethical%20guidelines%20for%20development%20implementation%20and%20use%20of%20robust%20and%20accountable%20AI.pdf) Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Graefe, A. (2016). *Guide to automated journalism*. Tow Center for Digital Journalism.

- Kotenidis, E., & Veglis, A. (2021). Algorithmic journalism—current applications and future perspectives. *Journalism and Media*, 2(2), 244–257. DOI:10.3390/journalmedia2020014
- Marković, S. (2023) Srbija se priprema za AI revoluciju. UNDP, April 28, 2023 <https://www.undp.org/serbia/blog/serbia-prepares-ai-revolution> Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Miroshnichenko, A. (2018). “AI to Bypass Creativity. Will Robots Replace Journalists? (The Answer Is “Yes”)” *Information* 9 (7) 183. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info907018>
- Nechushtai, E, & Lewis, S.C. (2019). What kind of news gatekeepers do we want machines to be? Filter bubbles, fragmentation, and the normative dimensions of algorithmic recommendations. *Computers in Human Behavior* 90: 298–307.
- REM, Saopštenje povodom korišćenja mogućnosti veštačke inteligencije u programima, 21.8.2023. <https://www.rem.rs/sr-lat/arhiva/vesti/2023/08/saopstenje-povodom-korisecenja-mogucnosti-vestacke-inteligencije-u-programima-pmu#gsc.tab=0> Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Schudson, M (2012). *The Sociology of News*. Second Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company
- Shao, C.et all. (2017). The spread of fake news by social bots. *ArXiv* :1707.07592.
- Simon, F. (2024) Artificial Intelligence in the News: How AI Retools, Rationalizes, and Reshapes Journalism and the Public Arena. *Columbia Journalism Review*, December 6, 2024 https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/artificial-intelligence-in-the-news.php
- Strategy for Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia (2019), Government of Serbia Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025 Accessed September 12th 2024
- Surčulija Milojević, J. (2018). Defamation as a “weapon” in Europe and in Serbia: Legal and self regulatory frameworks, Southwestern Law School: Los Angeles American Bar Association: Chicago, 99-128
- UNESCO, (2021), Recommendation on the Ethics of AI <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137/PDF/381137eng.pdf.multi> Accessed: September 12th 2024
- Kulić, Milica, (2021) „Dezinformacije u polarizovanom okruženju: medijska Slika Srbije u: Građani u doma dezinformacija, Zbornik radova sa redovne međunarodne konferencije Udruženja za političke nauke Srbije, Beograd: UPNS, 7-27
- Wardle, C. (2020). Understanding Information Disorder. *The First Draft*. <https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/> Accessed September 12th 2024

Veštačka inteligencija u medijima u Srbiji: kada satira nije smešna

Prof.dr Milica Kulić

Vanredna profesorka Fakulteta političkih nauka, Univerzitet u Beogradu

Apstrakt

Upotreba veštačke inteligencije (AI) postaje svakodnevica u profesionalnoj rutini novinara. AI postaje alatka za brži rad, automatsko generisanje tekstova, kao i pomoć za sve radnje koje su repetitivne. Međutim, upotreba AI u medijima nalazi plodno tle za najrazličitije vrste zloupotreba, obračun sa neistomišljenicima i klevetu (weaponized defamation).

Vlada Srbije je opredeljena da uhvati korak u razvoju i primeni veštačke inteligencije u raznim oblastima, međutim, opredeljenje Vlade ne prati adekvatna zakonska politika kada je reč o medijima. Trenutno ne postoji zakon koji reguliše ovu oblast, pa se svi oni koji su ugroženi postojećom praksom pozivaju na srodne ili krovne zakone koji ne obuhvataju sve potencijalne prekršaje u ovoj oblasti niti sprečavaju dalje manipulacije. U ovom radu analizira se pravni okvir za regulisanje veštačke inteligencije u medijima, kao i mogućnost samoregulacije. Rad se bazira na studiji slučaja u kojoj je medijski tajkun Željko Mitrović na svojoj X platformi, a zatim i u informativnim programima Televizije Pink, emitovao takozvani satirični video, a u stvari deepfake video generisan pomoću veštačke inteligencije, u kojem se sramote opozicioni predstavnici. Rad analizira i prvu tužbu i presudu koju je opozicioni predstavnik Dragan Đilas dobio protiv Željka Mitrovića i Televizije Pink, na osnovu video sadržaja koji je generisan putem AI i emitovan u televizijskom programu. Dometi ove presude ukazuju na mogućnosti i nedostatke pravnog okvira u ovoj oblasti, u medijima u Srbiji.

Cljučne reči: Veštačka inteligencija, mediji, pravni okvir, samoregulacija, Srbija

Received: 15th September 2024
Revision received: 4th October 2024
Accepted: 11th October 2024

Domestic Video Streaming Services - Characteristics, Offer and Perception of Users in Serbia¹

Ilija Milosavljević^{2,3}, Ph.D.

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš

Abstract

The second half of the past decade was marked by the explosive growth of streaming platforms and services both in Serbia and globally. Numerous foreign services have emerged after Netflix debuted in Serbia in 2016. Simultaneously, a number of local services have also emerged, attempting to take advantage of the benefits of local access and native content.

The objectives of this work are to outline the most popular domestic streaming services in Serbia, their unique features, business and communication strategies, and the programs they offer. It also looks at the traits and perspectives of these services' users with regard to series viewing and domestic streaming in general. A total of 139 customers of domestic streaming services completed a specifically designed questionnaire, which was included in the research done in June and July of 2023. The questionnaire responses were evaluated using quantitative descriptive and comparative statistical methods. The majority of users of domestic streaming services, according to the data, do so primarily because of the services' affordability and ease of use; the domestic series and movies that these services offer, however, are not as big of a selling point as previously believed. The overall conclusion of the research is that there is a trend toward westernization of tastes and habits that is being influenced by globally dominant streaming services and spreading to domestic audiences and domestic content viewers. This could eventually have a very negative impact on domestic production, streaming, and Serbia's distinct cultural identity in general. This research fills the gap in understanding the characteristics and preferences of Serbian audiences regarding domestic streaming services, especially in comparison to global competitors like Netflix

Keywords: streaming, audience, RTS Planeta, Apollon, series, movies

¹ This paper was presented at the International Scientific Conference *Media and Challenges of the Modern Society*, held on May 30–31, 2024, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.

² Corresponding author: ilija.milosavljevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

³ ORCID: 0000-0003-2341-7637

Domestic Video Streaming Services - Characteristics, Offer and Perception of Users in Serbia

Introduction

By 2016, the phenomenon of video streaming and video-on-demand payment in Serbia was relatively unfamiliar. This year can be considered a turning point, as video content consumption in this manner began to enter the mainstream, primarily due to the introduction of Netflix, a leading video-on-demand service, in the country, and later in the year, Amazon Prime Video.

This option and the shift in how a growing segment of the audience consumes online video content, including series and films, have introduced several innovations such as individualization in viewing (Radošinska, 2017), the selection of time and place of viewing (Jenner, 2018: 109), control over content (Cabral Martins, 2019), and many others.

This was a novelty for people in Serbia because awareness of the subscription-based model, specifically, a model where users can pay for exclusive content to watch online, was not particularly prevalent among the media audience. Instead, television was the most common way to consume series and movies (Simeunović Bajić, 2015: 17). However, this does not mean that streaming technology was not used in the country. Primarily, YouTube was one of the most utilized platforms in Serbia at the time for both information and entertainment purposes (Pavlović & Obradović, 2015). Additionally, video streaming was also employed through accessing pirated and illegal streaming sites and their content. Data from 2015 indicated that the level of digital piracy in the country was 68% (Export.gov, 2018), which included viewing pirated series and films online.

Nevertheless, the emergence and popularity of Netflix worldwide and in Serbia has led to new behaviors, habits, and expectations among audiences due to the different methods of content creation, distribution, and promotion (Milosavljević, 2024). In other words, a new market has emerged, in which all legal streaming content distributors operate. Given that this was a complete novelty both for the audience and for the entire media system and regulatory framework, the aim of this study is to present the conditions within this new market, with a particular emphasis on how domestic streaming services have attempted to establish a foothold and the perceptions of users who engage with them. This paper seeks to answer the following question: How do domestic streaming services in Serbia compete with global platforms in terms of user preferences and content offerings?

SVOD market conditions in Serbia

The innovations introduced by the development of video-on-demand services have radically transformed the media market, which has been only gradually adapting to these rapid changes. The lack of SVOD awareness and presence resulted in a lack of regulation for foreign services. For the first year, they did not even pay taxes (Milosavljević, 2024: 128), while only two years after their initial arrival, the

government of the Republic of Serbia set a goal to regulate these services (Radna verzija Strategije razvoja sistema javnog informisanja Republike Srbije do 2023. godine, 2018). The slow adaptation of regulatory market frameworks to the new entities in Serbia's media system is also indicated by the fact that until 2020 they did not even have to have a legal representative (Poverenik za informacije od javnog značaja i zaštitu podataka o ličnosti, 2020), and to this day, they are not registered as any form of media services.

These data indicate that video-on-demand services in Serbia were granted an exceptionally high degree of market freedom, particularly during the initial years of their arrival. This is especially notable when compared to other countries such as Poland or Denmark, where regulations mandate that foreign video content providers must invest in domestic production and, consequently, offer local programming in their catalogs (Vlassis, 2023), or China, where the market is so rigidly regulated that Netflix and its content are not even granted direct access (Shi & Zhou, 2021). Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and other services available in Serbia have no obligation to offer local content to the public, nor are they required to subtitle or dub their content. In other words, regarding many aspects, these services have no need to treat Serbia as a distinct market. This is evident from the example of Netflix, which, throughout its existence, has offered only two titles produced in Serbia: the film *Bad Blood* (Nečista krv: Greh predaka) and the documentary *The Long Road to War* (Dugo putovanje u rat) (Milosavljević, 2024: 143).

On one hand, such a situation may represent an advantage from the perspective of not needing to define specific business, distribution, and communication strategies. On the other hand, neglecting local market specifics can have several negative consequences for the efficiency of media operations. This is particularly relevant when considering the results of earlier studies on audiences in Serbia, which indicate that a significant part of the audience is not enthusiastic about foreign, especially English-language content, for several important reasons. Firstly, nearly one-third of the population generally harbors negative sentiments toward the West and its content (Institut za evropske poslove, 2023; Gavrilović, 2011). Secondly, for instance, while the average American citizen in 2016 had to allocate 0.05% of their monthly salary for services like Netflix, a Serbian citizen has to spend more than 2% (Milosavljević, 2024: 133). In other words, this type of media consumption and entertainment is considerably more expensive. Finally, it is important to note that there is a significant portion of the audience, particularly among the older population, who prefer domestic content over the foreign content offered by these services (Ipsos Strategic Marketing, 2015).

This indicates that there is a significant market gap for SVOD services that distribute films and series in Serbia, which foreign competitors are unable to adequately cover due to the specific characteristics of certain audience segments that favor more affordable domestic content. While several studies have examined the global rise of streaming platforms (Lobato, 2019), there is limited research focusing on how local streaming services in smaller markets like Serbia navigate this competitive landscape

Domestic streaming services – characteristics and types

Before major foreign SVOD services became available in Serbia, and for several years thereafter, the offering of domestic and regional content distributed in this manner was very limited, primarily oriented toward the concept of “Video Club” packages within IPTV television services (Milosavljević, 2024: 125). However, with the rise in popularity and accessibility of traditional SVOD services, several domestic services emerged that aimed to fill a market niche that was not adequately addressed by large foreign services, whether due to content offerings, pricing, or user access.

Among the most significant domestic services in Serbia are:

1. Apollon – The largest domestic SVOD service operating on a traditional monthly subscription model costing 499 dinars per month. Established in 2021, it boasts the largest library of both foreign and domestic content among domestic services, with approximately 10,000 hours of programming. All titles are either subtitled or dubbed, with the domestic content primarily comprising productions from Telekom Serbia (on whose platform it is available) and the media company Pink (Apollon, n.d.). The major advantage of this service is its exceptionally extensive foreign film library.
2. RTS Planeta – A service of the public media company Radio Television of Serbia, available since 2018. It is free for users within Serbia, while international users are required to pay for access. It offers live streaming of RTS channels, as well as a variety of on-demand audio and video content such as shows, documentaries, and PGP RTS publications (RTS PLANETA, n.d.). The majority of the offered content is domestic, but the “Cinema” section includes foreign films. This service particularly gained popularity and media presence during the COVID-19 pandemic when it was used for streaming and providing educational materials to students during the lockdown (Stojanović, 2020: 124).
3. Pickbox NOW – A regional streaming service operating in the former Yugoslav countries since 2014. The “Start” package is priced at 575 dinars and provides access to a catalog of foreign series and films with subtitles, with some animated content being dubbed (Pickbox Now, n.d.). Domestic content is virtually absent from the platform, but its major advantages include its long-standing presence, regional focus, especially regarding subtitles, and availability on the platforms of both mentioned cable operators.
4. Moj OFF – A domestic service established in 2020, primarily focused on foreign films that have been shown at festivals or were relatively short-lived in theaters, while its series offering is very modest, comprising only a few titles. The basic subscription package costs 349 dinars but it does not include premium movies and festival streaming (Moj OFF, n.d.).
5. KinoKauch – Another domestic service specializing in European art-house and documentary films (KinoKauch, n.d.). It is not an SVOD but rather

a TVOD service, which means that it is not subscription based (monthly payment for unlimited or limited catalog) but rather transactional based, where renting or purchasing each film is charged separately. Its greatest advantage is that it allows users to follow certain film festivals.

In addition to the aforementioned services, there are smaller platforms that are typically free and function as digital repositories or websites for specific productions, but they offer very limited content and are often highly specialized. The only major potential competitor already mentioned is YouTube, where users can find certain domestic and foreign films and series uploaded by rights holders or other parties for free viewing. Since 2024, RTS has created a dedicated channel on this platform named *RTS TV serije*, which offers domestic serial productions owned by the broadcaster, completely free of charge.

If we analyze the specifics of these services and classify them according to categories of advantages and disadvantages from the perspective of audience needs as outlined in the previous section, it is interesting to note the significant differences in what each service offers and which segment of the audience it targets.

Table 1: Overview of Specific Advantages and Disadvantages of Each of the 5 Domestic Services

Name of Streaming Service	Advantages	Disadvantages
Apollon	Extensive library of both foreign and domestic content, including dubbed and titled content.	Subscription price near to the basic Netflix package in Serbia.
RTS Planeta	Large selection of domestic productions, association with the public media brand in Serbia, and no subscription fee.	Relatively small catalog of titles, particularly foreign content.
Pickbox NOW	Longest-standing streaming service available in Serbia with a comprehensive catalog of foreign series and films.	Lack of domestic content and higher price compared to other services.
Moj OFF	Low price of the basic package and a catalog tailored to specific tastes.	Very limited series selection and lack of domestic content.
KinoKauch	Catalog offering specialized content and the ability to follow film festivals..	Transaction-based model lacking the flexibility of SVOD services and absence of domestic content.

Thus, if the primary motivation for viewers in selecting particular series is access to domestic content, they will most likely choose Apollon or RTS Planeta,

especially if they are more inclined toward traditional national media and public broadcasting services. On the other hand, if language barriers are a major issue when accessing popular content, Pickbox NOW or Apollon will be preferred, as they offer adequate subtitles and a large catalog. Fans of series and films who favor lesser-known, art-house productions are more likely to choose Moj OFF or KinoKauch. In other words, the video streaming market in Serbia should not be viewed solely through the lens of domestic versus foreign services, but rather as a much more complex and nuanced landscape, even when considering only domestic services.

Methodology

The objective of this study is to examine the tastes and preferences of the domestic audience regarding watching series and movies online and the use of five domestic streaming services. The research instrument utilized was a specially designed questionnaire consisting of 30 questions, which allowed respondents to select one or more of the provided answers. This questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed online during June 2023 using a snowball sampling method.

The analytical approach employed was a combination of quantitative descriptive and comparative content analysis. This analysis was conducted using SPSS 24.0 software. It is important to note that although the questionnaire was completed by 756 respondents, only the responses of 139 individuals were analyzed. This subset was selected because these respondents confirmed that they use at least one of the five domestic streaming services in question, ensuring that the data collected is relevant to the scope of this study. The categorization and comparison of responses were conducted based on the selected services used by the participants (allowing them to choose multiple services). It is important to note that the responses for Moj OFF and KinoKauch were aggregated due to significant similarities in the characteristics of these two services and the overall number of responses relative to the sample size. This aggregation was performed to enable a more comprehensive and relevant statistical correlation and comparison. By combining the data for Moj OFF and KinoKauch, the analysis aimed to enhance the robustness of the statistical results, ensuring that the comparisons and correlations drawn reflect a more accurate and complete picture of user preferences and behaviors in relation to these streaming services.

Results and discussion

The fact that only 18.39% of the total respondents (139 out of 756) use any of the mentioned domestic streaming services indicates that the market, or the audience interested in the content offered by domestic streaming platforms, is relatively small. Among users of domestic streaming services, there is a significantly higher proportion of females (73.4%) compared to males (26.6%). Particularly noteworthy is that the

largest age group is between 31 and 45 years old (40.3%). This is a significant finding as it highlights the demographic differences between domestic and international streaming service users. For instance, the average user of Netflix and other major global streaming services tends to belong to a younger demographic (Pattinson, 2024), specifically between the ages of 16 and 35 years (Mishra & Esaimani, 2020: 8), with some studies indicating the predominant age range as 21 to 25 years (Santhosh, 2019: 82). In contrast, the average user of domestic services is somewhat older.

This age disparity also reveals another characteristic—employment status. A substantial 90.6% of respondents who use domestic services are employed and live in larger families (3 to 5 members) – 53.2%. Additionally, the market for domestic providers has its own peculiarities, evidenced by the fact that only 19.4% of users watch series and films for several hours a day, with most doing so only a few times a week (43.2%). However, when they do engage, they often dedicate a longer period to it, watching several episodes of a series consecutively (79.9%). On the other hand, over a quarter of users primarily watch series and films on television channels (25.9%), although streaming remains a dominant method (61.2%). Surprisingly, in terms of general characteristics, only 16.5% prefer domestic series, even on domestic platforms, while a substantial 69.8% favor foreign content, particularly in the English-speaking domain.

Thus, **the average follower of domestic streaming services in Serbia** is most likely to be female, between 31 and 45 years old, employed, and has a large family. They watch series and films, predominantly in English, several times a week, but in a longer period of time, more frequently online but also significantly on television.

This considerable homogenization of the audience and their habits is also reflected in the types of domestic services they use (Chart 1). Specifically, among the users of domestic services, 58.3% use RTS Planeta, while only half as many (26.6%) use Pickbox NOW. The percentages are even lower for those who access content through Apollon (16.5%), with Moj OFF and KinoKauch being followed by only 3 individuals, or 2.2%.

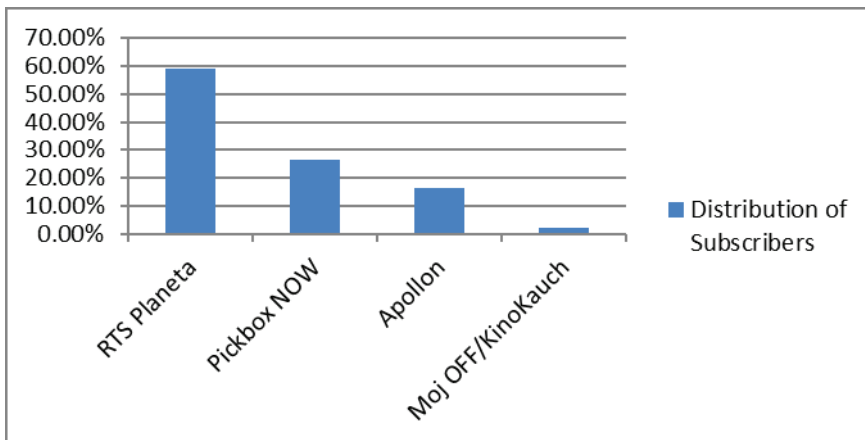


Chart 1: Distribution of Subscribers to Domestic Streaming Services in the Study Sample

The significant dominance of RTS Planeta can be explained by its advantages, which can be related to the general habits of the audience. Firstly, it is important to note that part of the audience is oriented toward watching content on television. Since RTS is a public media service, there is a **significant connection between traditional and contemporary content consumption**, both due to the same offering and the same brand association. Additionally, a crucial factor is that this **service is free**, which is particularly relevant considering that this segment of the audience does not watch series and films daily, but occasionally. Therefore, a constant subscription might seem uneconomical.

On the other hand, the results also indicate that the **duration of a service availability and range of content** is an important factor in the choice. Thus, Pickbox NOW and RTS, being among the oldest services, have the highest number of users, while Apollon has fewer, and services focusing on very narrow niches naturally have the fewest users.

The fact that content quality is not particularly relevant to users is also indicated by the responses to the question, “What are the main reasons for choosing these services?” Thus, only 18% of respondents prioritized content quality, while the two main reasons were **ease of use** (25.9%) and **content quantity** (23%). The greatest advantages of watching streaming video compared to traditional viewing of series and films are the **freedom to choose the time and place** of viewing (44,6%), as well as the freedom to choose from a **large amount of content** (25,2%). On the other hand, the greatest drawbacks are the high **cost of the service** (18.7%) and the fact that there are many services offering different content, so they **cannot have everything they follow in one place** (18.7%), which can again be linked to the unwillingness to pay for multiple services.

When examining significant statistical differences in cross-referenced responses, considering the dispersion of responses, there were not many notable indicators. It is interesting to note that all users over the age of 65 who utilize streaming services chose RTS Planeta, whereas all users of Moj OFF or KinoKauch were between the ages of 31 and 45, have a job and live with only one more person. Additionally, the highest proportion of users preferring domestic content among subscribers was observed for RTS Planeta (27.7%) and Apollon (14.3%), whereas this percentage was significantly lower for Pickbox Now and Moj OFF or KinoKauch (2.9% and 0%, respectively).

When comparing user responses regarding what they perceive as the greatest advantage of a particular video streaming service, it is significant that these perceptions largely align with those presented in Table 1. Specifically, the majority of users regard the ease of use and accessibility as the greatest advantage of RTS Planeta (31.5%), while most users of Apollon highlight its extensive catalog as its primary strength (25%). In contrast, users of Pickbox Now and those subscribed to Moj OFF or KinoKauch consider the high-quality content offered by these services to be their best feature (28.6% and 33.3%, respectively).

Based on all the responses, it can be generally concluded that the market for domestic streaming services is targeted at somewhat older users compared to global

services like Netflix. This demographic is too old to be the primary target group for such streaming services but still too young to rely exclusively on traditional media channels. Nevertheless, traditional channels and brands play a significant role in familiarizing users with streaming technology, serving as a bridge to this relatively new medium. For this segment of the audience, having high-quality local content is less important than ensuring that the service is not excessively expensive and offers a comprehensive catalog for the price. However, given the differences in preferences and practices within this audience, it is possible to categorize its members into three segments based on their responses and the characteristics of the services they use:

1. *Audience with Pre-Streaming Preferences and Habits* – This is the largest segment, which includes not only younger users but also older members of the audience. They are characterized by their use of services that extend traditional media, a preference for ease of use, familiar, and somewhat local content, and an inclination to avoid subscription fees for content viewing (which is related to traditional television viewing habits).
2. *Audience Primarily Consuming Foreign Content on Domestic Services* – This is a slightly smaller segment that subscribes to domestic services but predominantly watches foreign content with subtitles or dubbing.
3. *Audience with Very Specific Tastes* – This is a very small segment, mostly comprising individuals under 45 years old living in small communities, with highly specific demands regarding film and television content. They use domestic services that provide such niche content.

Conclusion

Although segmented, the domestic market for on-demand streaming services is very small. Overall, audiences tend to prefer global streaming services, especially among the younger demographic. On one hand, this segmentation can be argued to be generationally conditioned. Domestic services are primarily used by individuals over the age of 30, whereas younger individuals are more inclined toward global services. These observations, coupled with the fact that foreign services do not offer domestic content, may lead to the risk of a certain form of taste assimilation that is already in progress (Goncharenko et al., 2023: 14) in line with global trends of major services, particularly considering that even those who follow domestic series and films do so significantly less than they did a decade ago. This trend of diminishing importance of domestic programming and the role of domestic content providers, combined with the issue of the relative lack of regulation in the streaming market in Serbia, especially concerning the protection of domestic companies and content, may have significant implications for cultural specificities, habits, and even a form of cultural identity among the audience in Serbia, which is, in part, shaped through domestic content as segments of culture and cultural heritage (Đurković 2005: 358). Therefore, to counter the trend of westernization and cultural imperialism

(Tomlinson, 1991), domestic streaming services should consider investing in high-quality, original local productions and explore collaborations with regional content creators to maintain cultural relevance.

Analyzing three distinct groups of followers of domestic streaming services reveals that several factors influence the existence of domestic streaming services. For the group *Audience with Pre-Streaming Preferences and Habits* the factors include ingrained habits, the need for simplicity, and familiarity. In the case of the *Audience Primarily Consuming Foreign Content on Domestic Services* it can be assumed that language barriers or differences in pricing compared to foreign services play a role. For the *Audience with Very Specific Tastes* it cannot even be asserted that they are genuinely interested in domestic services, but rather in specific content that global services do not provide. Particularly in the case of the latter two groups, it is quite possible that their needs could be met in the future through changes or adjustments in the offerings of international services, which would result in a significant reduction in the market where domestic services can compete with the global ones.

It should be noted that this research does not represent a study of a representative sample, and a much more comprehensive and in-depth study of the viewing habits, preferences, practices, and expectations of streaming service audiences in Serbia is needed. One of the additional limitations of the research is that not all analyzed services followed the same subscription model, particularly *RTS Planeta*, which is free, and this has undoubtedly influenced the structure of responses and audience preferences. However, the data obtained are sufficient to conclude that it is crucial to take certain measures to protect and ensure the development of both domestic production and distribution, in a way that allows them to compete with major international services. This is not only about protecting the domestic market but also about preserving cultural specificities and identity.

References

- Apollon. (n.d.). *Holivudski i domaći filmovi i serije bez reklama*. Retrieved August 16, 2024, from <https://apollon.rs/>
- Cabral Martins, A. (2019). Netflix and TV-as-Film: A case study of *Stranger Things* and *The OA*. In *Netflix at the Nexus: Content, Practice, and Production in the Age of Streaming Television* (pp. 81-96).
- Đurković, M. (2005). Prva petoletka - domaće televizijske serije i transformacija sistema vrednosti u tranziciji. *Sociološki pregled*, 39(4), 357-381. <https://doi.org/10.5937/socpreg0504357D>
- Export.gov. (2018). *Serbia - Protection of property rights*. Retrieved March 9, 2023, from <https://www.export.gov/apex/article?id=Serbia-Protection-of-Property-Rights>
- Gavrilović, L. (2011). Bafi ubica vampira: superheroina, ali ne u Srbiji. *Etnoantropološki problemi*, 6(2), 413-428.
- Goncharenko, M., Zhen, W. Z., Yang, X. Y., Ismail, N. A., & Xu, D. R. (2023). Netflix, the success of global storytelling. *Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 2023.

- Institut za evropske poslove. (2023). *Istraživanje javnog mnjenja – stavovi građana Srbije prema SAD*. Retrieved August 18, 2024, from <https://iea.rs/blog/2023/11/01/stavovi-gradjana-srbije-prema-sad/>
- Ipsos Strategic Marketing. (2015). *Jačanje medijske slobode - Analiza medijskog tržišta u Srbiji*. Ipsos Media CT.
- Jenner, M. (2018). *Netflix and the re-invention of television*. Springer.
- KinoKauch. (n.d.). *O nama*. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://kinokauch.com/onama/>
- Lobato, R. (2019). *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*. NYU Press.
- Milosavljević, I. (2024). *Komunikacione strategije promocije i distribucije serija posredstvom striming servisa Netfliks u Srbiji*. University of Niš.
- Mishra, S., & Esaimani, V. (2020). A study on popularity of Netflix among youth. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 3(3), 7-13.
- Moj OFF. (n.d.). *Česta pitanja*. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://mojoff.net/page/cesta%20pitanja/2>
- Pattinson, C. (2024). *NETFLIX INC (NFLX) Communication services – Media & entertainment*. The Henry Fund, Henry B. Tippie College of Business. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from https://www.biz.uiowa.edu/henry/download/s24_NFLX.pdf
- Pavlovic, D., & Obradovic, N. (2015). YouTube as a resource for continuous education of journalism students. In I. Roceanu, L. Ciolan, C. Radu, Ş. T. Matu, & I. A. Stefan (Eds.), *Rethinking education by leveraging the eLearning pillar of the Digital Agenda for Europe! (Vol. 1) (258–263)*. “Carol I” National Defence University. <https://doi.org/10.12753/2066-026X-15-038>
- Pickbox Now. (n.d.). *Česta pitanja*. Retrieved August 16, 2024, from <https://www.pickboxnow.com/sr/faqs>
- Poverenik za informacije od javnog značaja i zaštitu podataka o ličnosti. (2020). *Netflix i Booking imenovali predstavnike za Republiku Srbiju u skladu sa Zakonom o zaštiti podataka o ličnosti*. Retrieved August 19, 2024, from <https://www.poverenik.rs/sr-yu/arkhiva/aktuelnostiarhiva/3416-netflix-i-booking-com-именовали-представнике-за-републику-србију-у-складу-са-законом-о-заштити-података-о-личности.html>
- Radošinska, J. (2017). New trends in production and distribution of episodic television drama: Brand Marvel-Netflix in the post-television era. *Communication Today*, 8(1), 4-29.
- Santhosh, M. (2019). A study on impact of Netflix on other online streaming channels. *Seshadripuram Journal of Social Sciences (SJSS)*, 2(1), 80-91.
- Shi, Y., & Zhou, J. (2021). Analysis of foreign video streaming service entering Chinese streaming media market: A case study of Netflix. In *2021 International Conference on Public Relations and Social Sciences (ICPRSS 2021)* (pp. 337-343). Atlantis Press.
- Simeunović Bajić, N. (2015). Istraživanje publike domaćih televizijskih serija. *CM - Časopis za upravljanje komuniciranjem*, 10(35), 5-32. <https://doi.org/10.5937/comman10-9308>
- Stojanović, D. (2020). Analiza realizacije učenja na daljinu u Srbiji za vreme pandemije virusa COVID-19. In *Black Swan in the World Economy 2020*. Institut ekonomskih nauka.

- Tomlinson, J. (1991). *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*. Continuum.
- Vlassis, A. (2023). Platform governance and the politics of media regulation: The review of the European Audiovisual Media Services Directive. *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 14(1), 29-46.
- Radna verzija Strategije razvoja sistema javnog informisanja Republike Srbije do 2023. godine. (2018). Retrieved August 19, 2024, from <https://www.kultura.gov.rs/tekst/307/radna-grupa-za-izraduradne-verzije-strategije-razvoja-sistema-javnog-informisanja-u-republici-srbiji-do-2023-godine.php>
- RTS Planeta. (n.d.). *Česta pitanja*. Retrieved August 16, 2024, from <https://rtsplaneta.rs/static/4>

Domaći video streaming servisi - karakteristike, ponuda i percepcija korisnika u Srbiji

dr Ilija Milosavljević,
Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu

Apstrakt

Druga polovina prethodne decenije obeležena je naglim rastom striming platformi i servisa, kako u Srbiji, tako i na globalnom nivou. Brojni strani servisi su se pojavili nakon što je Netflix postao dostupan u Srbiji 2016. godine. Istovremeno, nastao je i niz lokalnih servisa, koji su pokušali da iskoriste prednosti lokalnog pristupa tržištu i domaćeg sadržaja.

Ciljevi rada su da predstavi najpopularnije domaće streaming servise u Srbiji, njihove jedinstvene karakteristike, poslovne i komunikacione strategije, kao i programe koje nude. Takođe, rad analizira osobine i stavove korisnika ovih servisa u vezi sa gledanjem serija i domaćim strimingom uopšte. Istraživanje je sprovedeno u junu i julu 2023. godine putem posebno kreiranog upitnika, koji je popunilo 139 korisnika domaćih striming servisa. Odgovori su analizirani korišćenjem kvantitativnih, deskriptivnih i komparativnih statističkih metoda. Prema prikupljenim podacima, većina korisnika domaćih striming servisa ih koristi prvenstveno zbog pristupačnosti i jednostavnosti upotrebe, dok domaće serije i filmovi nisu toliko presudni kako se ranije smatralo. Zaključak istraživanja je da postoji trend ka zapadnjačkoj orijentaciji ukusa i navika, pod uticajem globalno dominantnih striming servisa i koji se širi na domaću publiku i potrošače domaćeg sadržaja. Ovo bi moglo imati veoma negativan uticaj na domaću produkciju, striming i na jedinstveni kulturni identitet Srbije u celini. Ovo istraživanje popunjava prazninu u razumevanju karakteristika i preferencija srpske publike kada su u pitanju domaći streaming servisi, posebno u poređenju sa globalnim konkurentima kao što je Netflix.

Cljučne reči: streaming, publika, RTS Planeta, Apollon, serije, filmovi

Received: 9th September 2024

Revision received: 4th October 2024

Accepted: 10th October 2024

Agora on the Internet: Can X's Spaces be interpreted as a Digital Platform for Democracy?¹

Nikola Doderović²³, Innovation Center of the University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

This paper aims to determine to what extent can X's Spaces be considered an evolution of the Athenian Agora. Through a comparative analysis, the key characteristics of these spaces were compared, including mobility, information transfer, democracy, freedom of speech, participation, and audience. Mobility represents a remarkable difference, where the agora was physically dependent, while Spaces could be used anywhere with a smart device and Internet access. Both cases provide real-time information transfer but differ in the context of a physical and virtual presence. Agora expressed direct democracy, while Spaces could only express indirect democracy. Freedom of speech at the agora was absolute, while Spaces were limited to X's terms of service. Participation was limited in both cases – to the slaves, women, and non-Athenian citizens at the agora, while on Spaces it depended on the host, who had absolute control. At the agora and Spaces, everyone could be part of the audience. The agora's audience used shouting and disruption as a form of expression, while the audience on Spaces could only react through emoticons. Although there were significant differences between these platforms, such as technological and regulatory aspects, both spaces provided an environment for public debate, expression of views, and communication. However, the lack of adequate regulation of X provides additional challenges such as polarization and hate speech. The research indicates the importance of understanding the evolution of democratic spaces and their impact on society in the digital age.

Keywords: Twitter, X, agora, democracy, freedom of speech, social media

Agora on the Internet: Can X's Spaces be interpreted as a Digital Platform for Democracy?

Introduction

Democracy, as an essential concept, represents the rule of the people, ensuring the equality of every citizen and enabling them to actively participate in deciding

¹ This paper was presented at the International Scientific Conference *Media and Challenges of the Modern Society*, held on May 30–31, 2024, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.

² Corresponding author: doderpress@gmail.com

³ ORCID: 0009-0009-7800-8428

public and state affairs (Vujaklija, 1980: 200-201). Within this framework, democracy is divided into two basic types: *indirect*, where citizens elect representatives who represent them in parliament; and *direct*, also known as “pure” democracy, which allows citizens to directly influence decisions within the state itself (Vujaklija, 1980: 200-201). The earliest traces of direct democracy date back to the 5th century B.C. in Athens, where the assembly used the *boule* (a council of over 500 citizens) and *dicastery* (judicial bodies) to shape policies (Raaflaub, 2007; Patriquin, 2015). The Assembly carefully supervised the implementation of its ideas, by monitoring the activities and responsibilities of officials (Raaflaub, 2007). Although several thousand citizens actively participated in politics, they were mostly men in ancient Athens, a certain number of whom served at least a one-year term in the *boule* (Raaflaub, 2007). Modern democratic systems mostly rely on a *representative model*, where other individuals act as mediators between the people and the government, and differ significantly from the ancient system that relied on the direct participation of citizens.

According to Macintosh (2004), electronic democracy, also known as e-democracy, digital democracy, or Internet democracy, involves the application of information and communication technologies to enable the engagement of citizens, support democratic processes, influence decision-makers, and strengthen representative democracy. He also states that in certain countries e-democracy is immediately associated with e-voting, which is not necessarily the only democratic way in which citizens can influence decision-makers (Macintosh, 2004). In addition to e-voting, there is also the concept of e-participation, which consists of dialogue and engagement between a country’s government and its citizens, with the help of technology. In Great Britain, the application of technological innovation has enabled citizens to inform themselves about decisions on old or forthcoming policies and allows them to give feedback (Macintosh, 2004).

Social media platforms also play an important role in realizing e-democracy and e-participation, enabling citizens to be informed, express their opinions, and participate in decision-making. Through platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, citizens can express their views on political proposals and communicate with relevant politicians through comments and direct messages. To push certain policies, decision-makers need to adequately present their intentions through social media channels and allow citizens to express their opinions and ideas, as a way of strengthening citizens’ need for participation. Ultimately, this reinforced need for participation can later put pressure on the authorities in their process of implementing certain ideas and decisions (Pflughoeft & Schneider, 2020). On the other hand, social theorists such as Habermas (2023) argue that even if the digital age has contributed toward the integration of boundaries through the use of social media, it has significantly advanced the “fragmentation of the public sphere” (Habermas, 2023: 8), which can be harmful to democracy itself.

The agora, within the ancient Greek city-states, was the central square and gathering place of the national assembly (Vujaklija, 1980: 8), of which the Athenian Agora is most famous for (Wycherley, 1957). In the beginning, it served as a track for annual religious games, and later it evolved into a market and a space for public

political discussions (Bancroft-Hunt, 2008). The agora had merchants selling their wares, artisans holding their workshops, and groups of people looking for work (Bancroft-Hunt, 2008), but to the public sphere of ancient Greek society, it represented a space where freedom of speech reigns. Citizens came to the agora to hear the latest news, and exchange rumors and information, where not only formal topics were discussed, which included the judiciary and magistracy, but also informal, everyday political issues (Forsdyke, 2013). Even if some authors suggest that the Athenian Agora shaped democracy through its initially direct system (Raaflaub, 2007; Patriquin, 2015), others argued that the political activities on the agora were more akin to legends or propaganda rather than factual history (Wycherley, 1957). Nevertheless, Benkler (2006) provides insight on how this idealized version of the agora gives perspective on how important the public sphere is, in the context of the expression of ideas, where our concerns are evaluated by others, argued for or against, and, finally, become acted upon if the potential is reached.

Spaces (formerly known as Twitter Spaces) represent special micro-platforms integrated with the social media X (formerly known as Twitter)⁴, where users can gather and conduct conversations through auditory means in real time (X 1, n.d.). These conversations can be started anytime and anywhere, or scheduled in advance (X 1, n.d.), as long as the user has an Android, iOS, or desktop device (X 2, n.d.) The host of the Space decides who can speak and when (X 2, n.d.), and can select up to three relevant topics (X 1, n.d.), to create a more specified audience. Because conversations on Spaces occur in real-time and can be missed, X has given hosts and other users two useful tools to immortalize certain conversations fully or in parts, through recording fully or “clipping” certain parts of the conversation on a Space (X 1, n.d.). The host can still delete a recorded Space after it ends, but it may be kept up to 30 days to review for violations of X’s terms of service, or even up to 120 days if a violation is found (X 1, n.d.).

Can the agora be brought online? The owner of X, Elon Musk, deeply believes in the feasibility of this concept, declaring that the platform is a “de facto town square” (Elliot, 2022). While analyzing X, certain parallels can be noticed, since freedom of speech tends to be more pronounced on the platform. However, it should be noted that the platform strictly enforces its content policy, which does not allow all forms of freedom of speech, especially those that directly incite violence, harassment, or harassment of users based on race, national, ethnic, or religious origin, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability or serious illness (X 3, n.d.; X 4, 2023). By viewing the Athenian Agora through a simplistic lens – as a place of political communication, where influential people are gathered, and ideas are exchanged to push certain policies – these aspects can be attributed to social media platforms, i.e., X, which has shown to include democratic actors, such as journalists and politicians, that can influence public trust of government affairs (Gil de Zúñiga,

⁴ The social media known as Twitter has rebranded itself to X, after the takeover of Elon Musk, who has described the rebrand as a way to make Twitter not just a platform but "everything". (Brodtkin, 2023; Napolitano, 2023; Sheth & Sundar, 2023). The platform will be referred to as X from this point on, if the Twitter brand is used through certain articles, URLs and names of certain pages.

Goyanes, & Mateos, 2024). Both the agora and X are environments that tend to promote open communication and interaction between individuals, with the addition that digital platforms are adaptable and allow access anywhere and at any time. Even if Spaces and X are compared, the former has less input delay, i.e., time between the back-and-forth of a post and comment, as the conversation is happening in real-time.

The politicization of these micro-platforms was inevitable, especially after the steps of the new owner of X, Elon Musk, announced that after four years (X, 2019), X will relax its rules around cause-based marketing in the US, to harmonize their advertising policy with television and other social media platforms (Dang, 2023). Another example can be seen in the governor of Florida, Ronald DeSantis' 2024 presidential bid with Elon Musk on Spaces (Datta, 2023). X's experimental step to give politicians and decision-makers a platform (Spaces) to communicate directly with users, provides a powerful tool and key mechanism in order to reach and address the audience that is not active on traditional channels. Piatak and Mikkelsen (2021) point out that with the increase in the number of politically engaged people on social media, their participation in offline activities, such as volunteering, donations, political campaigns, and voting, also increases. However, this should not be the only form of promoting civic participation. However, Lee (2022) explains that the social capital of X and Facebook has a significant impact on political engagement – X's social capital often correlates with activities within political organizations, while Facebook's social capital often correlates with activities outside of politics, in charitable organizations.

Given that in today's digital age, social media contributes toward free expression and exchange of ideas, as well as social engagement and political communication, the question arises: Do the X's Spaces have the inherent potential to evolve into a form of a digital agora, where users can freely share political discourse and directly communicate with decision makers? Spaces, as an auditory space, where topics can vary from typical to socio-political depending on the way of organization and subject matter, share certain analogies with the ancient Greek agora in Athens, as a place of democratic dialogue and political participation. Changes brought by X's Spaces, such as mobility, i.e., the possibility of freely moving these spaces, participation regardless of social status, nationality, or gender, as well as long-distance information transmission, can significantly influence the shaping of political communication and the encouragement of civic engagement in the realization of social change. However, potential challenges and dangers should also be taken into account when talking about X's Spaces, such as changes in the basic principles of democracy and the democratic transition from a direct to an indirect model, dilemmas in defining freedom of speech in the contemporary context, as well as limitations regarding the number of simultaneously present participants. For this reason, this paper aims to analyze these essential features more deeply, presenting the similarities and differences between these two platforms, as well as how Spaces can be seen as a potential digital incarnation of the Athenian Agora.

Methodology

The research tends to indicate the importance of understanding the evolution of democratic spaces and their impact on society in the digital age, especially social media, which have become a platform for expressing and presenting one's ideas. The subject of this research is focused on the analysis and comparison of information exchange, democratic principles, the role of the audience, and the level of freedom of speech and participation through a theoretical lens, within the context of the Athenian Agora and X's Spaces.

The paper aims to answer the following research question: *In what context can X's Spaces be considered a digital evolution of the Athenian Agora?*

Based on the research question, two research goals were defined:

1. To take a closer look at the differences between the functionality of the Athenian Agora and X's Spaces.
2. To identify the key similarities between the essential characteristics of the Athenian Agora and X's Spaces.

To answer the research question and achieve the stated research goals, a **case study** will be used to analyze the differences between these two spaces in depth. Special focus will be placed on the dynamics of democracy and the evolution of digital spaces compared to traditional, static formats. The comparative analysis between the Athenian Agora and X's Spaces will include parameters such as mobility of participants, methods of information transfer, types of democracy used, level of freedom of speech, rights to participate, and audience roles. Such an analysis will enable a deeper understanding of the evolution of democratic values and mechanisms throughout history, providing insight into how digital micro-platforms, such as X's Spaces, can later shape and transform the way we observe democratic processes and interactions with decision-makers in contemporary society.

Results

As part of the comparative analysis, we will consider the similarities and differences between the Athenian Agora and X's Spaces based on the following parameters: *mobility, transfer of information, type of democracy, freedom of speech, participation, and audience.*

Mobility. Ancient Greek agoras were the squares of the main and influential city-states, meaning this space is static and established in that specific place. On the other hand, on X's Spaces, due to the Internet and smart devices, users can transmit their "mini agoras" anywhere and anytime, as they are not tied to a physical space, but to portable devices with Internet access.

Transfer of information. Both the agora and Spaces share and transmit information in real-time, however, the aforementioned mobility parameter creates a difference in the context of transfer. On the Athenian Agora, people spoke live

with the assembly, boule, and dicastery, as well as numerous citizens (with no right to speak) physically present. On X's Spaces, the participants communicated with each other, while the audience listened to the discussions, both virtually present. Regardless of the platform, communication noise can form, which may affect the context of the transferred information. Communication noise on the agora can arise during heated discussions between decision-makers themselves, while the audience can drown out the debate by shouting and taunting. Technical problems on Spaces, including unstable Internet connection or poor-quality audio equipment, can disturb participants and affect the context of information, while the participants themselves may try to usurp the conversation to diminish the value of the opponent's position. Unlike the agora, the audience cannot affect the conversation directly in any way. Other technical problems, such as high Internet traffic and cyber-attacks, can affect important events, as was shown in Musk's conversations with DeSantis and Trump. Even if DeSantis' presidential bid was executed rather well on Spaces, technical difficulties were present due to the keen interest of users (Oliphant, 2023). High Internet traffic should have prepared X for future events with major socio-political figures. However, this was not the case. Similar technical difficulties arose with Musk's conversation with Donald Trump in 2024, which delayed the conversation. Trump took advantage of the problem, by praising Musk's platform for garnering such keen interest (Cowan & Sullivan, 2024). Musk claimed that a cyber-attack caused the problems, specifically a DDoS attack (distributed denial-of-service), in which servers and networks are overloaded with Internet traffic in an attempt to bring the system down, these claims were not proven (Cowan & Sullivan, 2024). Nevertheless, even with an extremely large number of technical problems, the event was listened to by 1.3 million people (Cowan & Sullivan, 2024), which proves that there is interest and potential for this platform to use Spaces as a form of digital agora for political discourse.

Types of democracy. As we mentioned previously, direct democracy ruled in Athens, where citizens had a direct influence on decision-makers. Although during the reign of Solon, the aristocrats had much more power, Cleisthenes reformed their roles by creating the boule, the dicastery, and the assembly, allowing the free citizens to have more influence (Patriquin, 2015). Important democratic tools were implemented in that period, such as ostracism (exiling). It was often used as a preventive measure against people who were considered dangerous, potential tyrants, or subversive - whose aim was to avoid quarrels, violence, or intense political conflicts in the form of civil wars (Patriquin, 2015). Although ostracism was rare, it served as a reminder to aristocrats to be mindful of their actions (Patriquin, 2015). Flaig (2013) claims that we are used to modern and slow democratic procedures, while problems arise when certain representative systems do not have a majority in parliament. Direct democracy does not suffer from these shortcomings (Flaig, 2013). In modern times, democracy is mostly indirect, both in individual states and through the Internet and social media. Although it seems that a globalized Internet system would allow more space for direct democracy and direct influence on decision-makers, this is only the case when controversial situations arise that force a certain

degree of accountability. Wagner (2013) explains that democracy has been through many transformations throughout history, but certain changes and needs in society have significantly influenced the way it is interpreted. Among the important changes, there is a greater need for representation as opposed to direct participation in political life; the need to stabilize the political order against the ideal of permanent openness to constant changes; and the most important fact – the possibility of every citizen being equal in political life in contrast to the ancient Greek norms in which women and slaves remained without the right to speak (Wagner, 2013). Trottier and Fuchs (2015) add the age of social networks, i.e., Facebook has three integrated elements: integrated sociality, i.e., the possibility of posting multimedia content to interact with other users; integrated roles, i.e., to represent our digital id through social networks; integrated and convergent communication on social networks, which will depend on our economic status, well-being and similar parameters that are mapped to individual profiles. Unfortunately, social media platforms such as Facebook and X have proven to contribute to political polarization by creating echo chambers and bubbles (Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016; Yonghwan & Youngju, 2019), where users isolate themselves from ideas and attitudes with which they would disagree (Bail, Argyle, Brown, & Volfovsky, 2018).

Freedom of speech. Before discussing the modern interpretation of freedom of speech as one of the basic human rights today, two important concepts must be provided, as they are often associated with this idea. In Ancient Greece, *isegoria* (grc. ἰσηγορία or *isēgoria*) was defined as the freedom of citizens to address the assembly (Lewis, 1971; Nakategawa, 1988). This meant that every male Athenian, who was not in exile or a slave, could participate in public debates and convince other citizens of his arguments and beliefs. Werhan (2008) describes *isegoria* as a forerunner of the First Amendment of the American Constitution, because of the similarities of the concept that helped shape the idea of democracy. On the other hand, the word *parrhesia* (grc. παρρησία or *parrēsia*) meant permission for anyone to say whatever they wanted, how and whenever they wanted, and to whomever they wanted (Foucault & Burchell, 2015; Walzer, 2013). Foucault (Foucault & Burchell, 2015; Walzer, 2013) said that *parrhesia* requires that the truth be expressed through it, defining its three key factors: the practice of *parrhesia* requires knowing oneself; *parrhesia* is devoid of any restrictions, having complete freedom of form; and *parrhesia* is a technique, that is, a virtue, in the sense that it strives beyond flattery, but toward the truth. Foucault further explained that a person who practices *parrhesia* over a subject, be it an individual or group, must pertain to a certain level of respect. This subject of *parrhesia* must tolerate the truth, even if it is offensive, while the practitioner of *parrhesia* must always speak the truth, even if it is subject to certain consequences (Foucault & Burchell, 2015; Walzer, 2013).

These two terms could co-exist on X if *isegoria* and *parrhesia* are protected by basic human rights that are defined through X's terms of service. *isegoria* is made possible through communication with decision-makers directly, where every citizen, regardless of sex, class, or nationality can present their dissatisfactions or ideas to politicians online. *Parrhesia* as absolute freedom of speech, devoid of consequences,

could not exist on X., because of the platform's rules against discrimination and offensive content in any sense (X 4, 2023). Certain violations may warrant temporary or permanent suspensions on X. On the other hand, Bejan (2017; 2019) defined parrhesia as an unstable privilege enjoyed by powerful people, or an ancient version of deplatforming, or no-platforming. Additionally, parrhesia today is mostly used by conservatives, who tend to reduce the idea of free speech to a simple license to offend (Bejan, 2017). Musk, after his takeover of X, has given certain controversial individuals the "license to offend", even briefly, by pardoning users that he felt should be reinstated. Musk pushed the idea that users would be able to post anything they wanted, as long as it was within legal bounds. In 2022, musician Ye (formerly known as Kanye West), continued creating anti-Semitic content, even after Musk's pardon, for which he was suspended once again (Klepper & O'Brien, 2022). However, Ye's posts would only be subjected to American law, and protected by the First Amendment (Klepper & O'Brien, 2022). Even if European law cannot affect X's policies yet, European legislators aim to universalize the law, by requiring tech giants to introduce regulations against disinformation and hate speech (Chan & Casert, 2022), if they want to be available in Europe. In another situation, the private X account of Donald Trump, former US president, was reinstated through a poll (Milmo, 2022), after being suspended in 2021 for undermining the election and inciting violence on the US Capitol (X, 2021). Initially, Trump was disinterested in X, focusing on his own platform, Truth Social (Dang & Coster, 2022), but has later collaborated with Musk (explained in the Audience section). Even if the reinstated accounts were reinstated through a poll, no individual should possess the power to decide who stays on X, let alone the owner of the platform.

By viewing parrhesia through Foucault's idea of "speaking the truth", its use on X can be challenged depending on the way that truth itself is interpreted. Musk's idea to transform X into a paradise for free speech is sabotaged by his own actions, as he selectively determines how the information is shared on the platform. In 2022, X suspended ten journalists for covering news about Musk and the platform itself (Abbruzzese, Collier, & Helsel, 2022), while introducing a new policy for accounts that follow private planes of famous individuals, including Musk himself (Wile, Collier, & Helsel, 2022). Mastodon's (social media competitor) X account was also suspended due to other Mastodon users sharing information regarding Musk's plane (Wile, Collier, & Helsel, 2022). These moves drew sharp criticism from government officials, free speech advocacy groups, and numerous journalistic organizations. The accounts were restored to certain journalists after other users voted on Musk's poll (Dang, 2022). Another democratic problem arose when X planned to ban users who promoted other social media platforms, which was hastily withdrawn (McShane, Abbruzzese, & Kaplan, 2022). X has clearly defined how it treats content that promotes hate speech (X 4, 2023), but Musk's takeover of the platform has proven that rules that are enforced are subjected to his own views. In 2024, X introduced restrictions for users who used the term "cisgender" (Cuthbertson, 2024) which Musk referred to as a slur before (Elsesser, 2023). However, the use of this word would not directly infringe X's terms of service, but the use of the term does not

correspond to the ideology that Musk stands for, which, again, shows that he tends to abuse the power he holds.

Participation. When we talk about the possibility of participation, at the agora there were restrictions on who has the right to speak. On the Athenian Agora, only free male Athenians could participate, while women, slaves, and citizens of other city-states were devoid of the right to speak or participate (Forsdyke, 2013). On the other hand, while X's Spaces did not employ these discriminatory practices by default, the host of a Space has the power to set restrictions that can be deemed discriminatory. Biased hosts can intentionally prevent other users from speaking, especially if it is not in their favor. The host and co-host can mute or permanently remove certain participants from their Space (X 1, n.d.), if they choose to. While muting or blocking can be a useful tactic to remove disruptive users, this tool can be abused when opinions clash. For this reason, certain hosts, in order to facilitate the conversation adequately, hire neutral moderators or mediators, who regulate the flow of communication between interlocutors as needed, thereby not jeopardizing anyone's right to speak. The agora has allowed citizens to know who the decision-makers are, and X has followed this ideal by great policy, by labeling user accounts of politicians and decision-makers as government or state-affiliated, and in that way, making it easier for other users to know who the people that represent their country are and giving them the option to talk to them through comments or any other means directly (X 5, n.d.). While there was no data to confirm if Athenians employed a limit on the number of participants that could speak simultaneously on the agora, each Space was limited to 13 users, including the host and up to 2 co-hosts (X 1, n.d.). For other users to become an interlocutor, an existing participant must be removed, meaning that they lose their right to speak, unless reinstated by the host (X 1, n.d.). Habermas (1991) explains that the "refeudalization" (Habermas, 1991: 158) of the public sphere includes the erasure of barriers between the public and private sphere, where a state adapts certain feudal aspects, but not all, while "representative publicity" (Habermas, 1991: 137) (i.e., a king or a small number of people) embody the state itself. If each Space is interpreted as a public sphere in itself, the hosts and participants become representative publicity, while the audience is there only to watch, or in this case, listen to them. This is why Habermas' (1991) standards, which include equal participation for everyone, form an ideal that, in itself, has utopian inclinations.

Audience. Women, slaves, and citizens from other city-states were denied the right to speak on the Athenian Agora. Even if they could not directly influence decision-makers, they had the opportunity to observe and potentially express their views, ideas, and disagreements by shouting or through violence (Forsdyke, 2013). Unlike the agora, the audience on Spaces could only silently react with emoticons, unless the host and co-host permitted them to participate (X 2, n.d.; X 1, n.d.). Democratic spheres, such as the agora, allowed the audience to gather information passively, but not participate in debates on the specific space. In contrast, there have been attempts to modernize said spheres through X's Spaces, which are, in theory, open to all, but have kept the constraint of passivizing the public, who can,

in this case, only interact through the use of emoticons. A passivized public does not enable a healthy public sphere to be formed, which to Habermas (1991), represents a principle of democracy. Only if personal opinions evolve through rational and critical debates can the public sphere evolve and have the opportunity to express and/or debate different views. Comments can be a useful workaround in order to allow the audience to chat with participants, as seen on live podcasts. Users can also be denied access to a Space or other content if the host and co-host block them (X 1, n.d.). However, the audience lacks the responsibility they had in the pre-digital age, as they can (ab)use anonymity for different goals (Habermas, 2023), i.e., by creating multiple accounts to disrupt conversations, even if they have been banned for a valid reason. Recorded Spaces can be listened to indefinitely after they end, but the host can choose to delete them, after which they are kept to 30 days to review for violations of X's terms of service, or up to 120 days in case a violation is found (X 1, n.d.). This means that the only way to adequately preserve certain Spaces is to employ the use of archival tools and/or recording applications outside of X. Spaces also show potential to attract wide audiences when high-profile political figures are involved, as was the case with Donald Trump (Cowan & Sullivan, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and comparison, we can conclude that X's Spaces have the potential to represent an evolution of the agora, or in the case of this research, a version of the Athenian Agora in the digital world, but only in the case of transfer of information and participation. The audience itself proves to be a challenge for X, as giving it an active form on Spaces could create a disruptive environment, while not implementing a more sophisticated form of reactions, i.e., comments, turns users into mute, passive recipients, as the communication between the audience and participants becomes one-sided. Spaces are only at the beginning of a long path of updates to achieve the status of a digital agora, including the parameters that have clashed with the original concept of the agora, due to polarization, selective control of content, and suspensions of users who disagree with the current owner of X. The platform must make an effort to decide on the way it features, implements, and enforces its terms of service so that there is no ambiguity. The concept of freedom of speech, whose roots are based on *isegoria* and *parrhesia*, could be practiced on X, but abused as well. While the agora represents a classic model of direct democracy, which is not practiced in most countries, Spaces can be used in the future as a modern way to practice indirect democracy. Participants can actively practice *isegoria*, i.e., direct communication with decision-makers on Spaces, but the users from the audience must be given the right to speak by the host. Although communication can be challenging due to potential communication noise or the undermining of dissenters, it still presents a very meaningful way for political figures to create an adequate relationship with their audience. *Parrhesia* in the context of absolute freedom of speech is impossible on X because of its terms of service, although there have been

attempts by X's owner, Elon Musk, to change this. However, by taking into account freedom of speech in the context of "speaking the truth" without infringing on the rights of others, X has adequately defined this in its terms of service but has yet to enforce it to its full potential. The way truth is interpreted on the platform can vary, as X has controversially silenced users and journalists for expressing their freedom of speech, even if X's terms of service were not infringed upon. This only proves that regulators can abuse their power to prevent users from expressing their views, while other users are given "the right to offend" if they align politically with said regulators. Additionally, regulation must not depend on an individual, especially not on the owner who may have a certain level of self-affirming bias. However, Spaces can become a potential marketplace for political communication, especially considering Musk's conversations with DeSantis and Trump, but this requires preparation and advancements in X's infrastructure in order to eliminate potential communication noise. This research provides insight into changes in the types of democracy currently present and the evolution of static and traditional spaces into virtual and mobile spaces. However, it is important to point out that findings in research based on existing theoretical standpoints may be subject to changes in the future, while the potential of this auditory platform in the digital world may be realized after a series of updates and revisions in order to better certain elements.

References

- Abbruzzese, J., Collier, K., & Helsel, P. (2022, December 16). *Twitter suspends journalists who have been covering Elon Musk and the company*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from NBC News: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/twitter-suspends-journalists-covering-elon-musk-company-rcna62032>
- Bail, C. A., Argyle, L. P., Brown, T. W., & Volfovsky, A. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 9216–9221. doi:10.1073/pnas.1804840115
- Bancroft-Hunt, N. (Ed.). (2008). *Living in Ancient Greece*. Thalamus Publishing.
- Bejan, T. M. (2017, December 2). *The Two Clashing Meanings of 'Free Speech'*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from The Atlantic: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/12/two-concepts-of-freedom-of-speech/546791/>
- Bejan, T. M. (2019). Two Concepts of Freedom (of Speech). *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 163, pp. 95-107. American Philosophical Society Press.
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven and London, UK: Yale University Press.
- Brodkin, J. (2023, July 24). *Musk rushes out new Twitter logo—it's just an X that someone tweeted at him*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from Ars Technica: <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2023/07/musk-rushes-out-new-twitter-logo-its-just-an-x-that-someone-tweeted-at-him/>

- Chan, K., & Casert, R. (2022, April 23). *EU law targets Big Tech over hate speech, disinformation*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/article/technology-business-police-social-media-reform-52744e1d0f5b93a426f966138f2ccb52>
- Cowan, R., & Sullivan, A. (2024, August 13). *Rambling Trump, Musk interview marred by tech issues*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/elon-musk-interview-trump-x-social-media-network-2024-08-12/>
- Cuthbertson, A. (2024, May 15). *X users have accounts restricted for using the term 'cisgender'*. Retrieved from The Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/x-cisgender-slur-cis-elon-musk-b2545355.html>
- Dang, S. (2022, December 17). *Elon Musk restores Twitter accounts of journalists but concerns persist*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/technology/elon-musks-twitter-suspension-journalists-draws-global-backlash-2022-12-16/>
- Dang, S. (2023, January 4). *Elon Musk's Twitter lifts ban on political ads*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/twitter-expand-permitted-political-advertising-2023-01-03/>
- Dang, S., & Coster, H. (2022, November 21). *Trump snubs Twitter after Musk announces reactivation of ex-president's account*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/technology/musks-twitter-poll-showing-narrow-majority-want-trump-reinstated-2022-11-20/>
- Datta, T. (2023, May 24). *Explainer: What is Twitter Spaces where DeSantis will announce his presidential run?* Retrieved February 29, 2024, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/what-is-twitter-spaces-where-desantis-will-announce-his-presidential-run-2023-05-24/>
- Elliot, R. (2022, April 14). *Elon Musk Urges Greater Transparency at Twitter, Calling Platform The 'De Facto Town Square'*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from The Wall Street Journal: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/elon-musk-urges-greater-transparency-at-twitter-calling-platform-the-de-facto-town-square-11649959658>
- Elsesser, K. (2023, July 2). *Elon Musk Deems 'Cis' A Twitter Slur—Here's Why It's Is So Polarizing*. Retrieved from Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2023/07/02/elon-musk-deems-cis-a-twitter-slurheres-why-its-is-so-polarizing/>
- Flaig, E. (2013). To Act with Good Advice: Greek Tragedy and the Democratic Political Sphere. In J. P. Arnason, K. A. Raaflaub, & P. Wagner (Eds.), *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy: A Politico-cultural Transformation and Its Interpretations* (pp. 71-98). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(Special Issue), 298–320.
- Forsdyke, S. L. (2013). The Impact of Democracy on Communal Life. In J. P. Arnason, K. A. Raaflaub, & P. Wagner (Eds.), *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy: A Politico-cultural Transformation and Its Interpretations* (pp. 227-260). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- Foucault, M., & Burchell, G. (2015). Parrēsia. *Critical Inquiry*, 41(2), 219-253. doi:10.1086/679075
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Goyanes, M., & Mateos, A. (2024). Twitter Communication Among Democracy Actors: How Interacting With Journalists and Elected Officials Influence People's Government Performance Assessment and Trust. *Social Media + Society*, 10(1). Preuzeto sa <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241232907>
- Habermas, J. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1st ed.). (T. Burger, Trans.) Cambridge, Massachusetts, US: The MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. (2023). *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*. (C. Cronin, Prev.) Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Klepper, D., & O'Brien, M. (2022, December 4). *As Musk is learning, content moderation is a messy job*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/article/kanye-west-elon-musk-twitter-inc-entertainment-technology-0bf6e0ab969a60cd38abd9358ee5fd47>
- Lee, Y. (2022). Social media capital and civic engagement: Does type. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 19, 167–189. doi:10.1007/s12208-021-00300-8
- Lewis, J. D. (1971). Isegoria at Athens: When Did It Begin? *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 20(2/3), 129-140. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4435186>
- Macintosh, A. (2004). Characterizing E-Participation in Policy-Making. *37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2004, Proceedings of the pp*, p. 10 pp. Big Island, HI, USA: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. doi:10.1109/HICSS.2004.1265300
- McShane, J., Abbruzzese, J., & Kaplan, E. (2022, December 18). *Twitter announces, then quickly retracts ban on promoting other social media*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from NBC News: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/twitter-bans-promotion-social-media-sites-facebook-instagram-truth-soc-rcna62305>
- Milmo, D. (2022, November 20). *Elon Musk reinstates Donald Trump's Twitter account after taking poll*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/nov/20/twitter-lifts-donald-trump-ban-after-elon-musks-poll>
- Nakategawa, Y. (1988). Isegoria in Herodotus. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 37(3), 257–275. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4436057>
- Napolitano, E. (2023, July 25). *Why Twitter's rebrand to X could be legally challenging*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from CBS News: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/twitter-trademark-x-com-rebrand/>
- Oliphant, J. (2023, May 25). *Ron DeSantis joins White House race, tripped up by chaotic Twitter launch*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/republican-desantis-announce-2024-presidential-run-wednesday-2023-05-23/>
- Patriquin, L. (2015). *Economic Equality and Direct Democracy*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9781137503480.0005

- Pflughoeft, B. R., & Schneider, I. E. (2020). Social media as E-participation: Can a multiple hierarchy stratification perspective predict public interest? *Government Information Quarterly*, 37(1). doi:10.1016/j.giq.2019.101422
- Piatak, J., & Mikkelsen, I. (2021). Does Social Media Engagement Translate to Civic Engagement Offline? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 50(5), 1079–1101. doi:10.1177/0899764021999444
- Raaflaub, K. A. (2007). Introduction. In K. A. Raaflaub, J. Ober, R. W. Wallace, P. Cartledge, & C. Farrar, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Prvo ed., pp. 1-22). Berkley and Los Angeles, California, US: University of California Press.
- Sheth, S., & Sundar, S. (2023, July 24). *Meta already appears to hold the rights to 'X'. It could make Twitter's rebrand complicated*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from Business Insider: <https://www.businessinsider.com/meta-holds-rights-to-x-twitter-rebrand-elon-musk-2023-7>
- Trottier, D., & Fuchs, C. (2015). Theorising Social Media, Politics and the State: An Introduction. In D. Trottier, & C. Fuchs (Eds.), *Social Media, Politics and the State: Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crimes and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube* (pp. 3-38). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Vujaklija, M. (1980). *Leksikon stranih reči i izraza [Lexicon of foreign words and expressions]*. Beograd [Belgrade]: Prosveta.
- Wagner, P. (2013). Transformations of Democracy: Towards a History of Political Thought and Practice in Long-term Perspective. In J. P. Arnason, K. A. Raaflaub, & P. Wagner (Eds.), *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy: A Politico-cultural Transformation and Its Interpretations* (pp. 47-68). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Walzer, A. E. (2013). Parrēsia, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 43(1), 1-21. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41722461>
- Werhan, K. (2008). The Classical Athenian Ancestry of American Freedom of Speech. *The Supreme Court Review*, 2008(1), 293-347. doi:10.1086/655121
- Wile, R., Collier, K., & Helsel, P. (2022, December 14). *Elon Musk threatens legal action, suspends Twitter account that tracks his jet*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from NBC News: <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/twitter-suspends-elon-jet-account-that-tracked-elon-musk-plane-rcna61718>
- Wycherley, R. E. (1957). Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia. *The Athenian Agora*, 3, iii–259. Preuzeto sa <https://doi.org/10.2307/3601955>
- X 1. (n.d.). *About X Spaces*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from Twitter Help Center: <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-x/spaces>
- X 2. (n.d.). *X Spaces how-to guide*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from X for business: <https://business.x.com/en/blog/twitter-spaces-how-to-guide.html>
- X. (2019, November). *Twitter Ads Policy Update Log*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from X for Business: <https://business.x.com/en/help/ads-policies/ads-policy-update-log.html>
- X. (2021, January 8). *Permanent suspension of @realDonaldTrump - Blog - X.com*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from X: https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/suspension

- X 3. (n.d.). *Rules and policies - Twitter Help Center - X.com*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from Twitter Help Center: <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies#safety-and-cybercrime>
- X 4. (2023, April). *X's policy on hateful conduct | X Help*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from Twitter Help Center: <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy>
- X 5. (n.d.). *About government and state-affiliated media account labels on X*. Retrieved March 1, 2024, from Twitter Help Center: <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/state-affiliated-china>
- Yonghwan, K., & Youngju, K. (2019). Incivility on Facebook and political polarization: The mediating role of. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 99, 219-227. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2019.05.022

Agora na internetu: Da li se Iksovi Prostori mogu tumačiti kao digitalna platforma za demokratiju?

Nikola Doderović, Inovacioni centar Univerziteta u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad teži da utvrdi u kojoj meri se Iksovi Prostori (*X's Spaces*) mogu smatrati evolucijom atinske agore. Komparativnom analizom, upoređene su ključne karakteristike ovih prostora, uključujući mobilnost, transfer informacija, vrstu demokratije, slobodu govora, učešće i publiku. Mobilnost predstavlja izuzetnu razliku, gde je agora bila fizički zavisna, dok se Prostorima moglo pristupiti bilo gde sa pametnim uređajem i internetom. Oba slučaja obezbeđuju prenos informacija u realnom vremenu, ali se razlikuju u kontekstu fizičkog i virtuelnog prisustva. Na agori je izražavana neposredna demokratija, dok se na Prostorima mogla izraziti samo posredna demokratiju. Sloboda govora na agori je bila apsolutna, dok su prostori bili ograničeni pravilima i uslovima korišćenja platforme Iks. Učešće je bilo ograničeno u oba slučaja – na robove, žene i ne-atinske građane na agori, dok je na prostorima zavisilo od domaćina, koji je imao apsolutnu kontrolu. Na agori i Prostorima je svako mogao biti deo publike. Publika agore je koristila vikanje i ometanje kao oblik izražavanja, dok je publika na Prostorima mogla reagovati samo pomoću emotikona. Iako su postojale značajne razlike između ovih platformi, poput tehnoloških i regulatornih aspekata, oba prostora su predstavljala okruženja za javnu debatu, izražavanje stavova i komunikaciju. Međutim, nedostatak adekvatne regulacije Iks platforme predstavlja dodatne izazove kao što su polarizacija i govor mržnje. Istraživanje ukazuje na važnost razumevanja evolucije demokratskih prostora i njihovog uticaja na društvo u digitalnom dobu.

Ključne reči: Tviter, Iks, agora, demokratija, sloboda govora, društvene mreže

Received: 12th September 2024

Revision received: 10th October 2024

Accepted: 14th October 2024

Responsibility in Citizen Journalism: Challenges and Perspectives

Danica Popović¹², Faculty of Philosophy, University of Nis, Serbia

Abstract

In today's digital age, mobile technologies are constantly reshaping the ways in which information is disseminated and consumed. Citizen journalism has become ubiquitous thanks to social networks, blogs, and content-sharing platforms. This opens up the opportunity for anyone to become a journalist, regardless of professional experience or education. While professional journalists often undergo processes of editing and information filtering, citizen journalists can share their opinions and experiences directly in real time. This can lead to faster news dissemination and quicker responses to current events. However, it is important to be aware of the challenges that come with citizen journalism. Since anyone can become a source of information, there is a risk of spreading unverified information. Therefore, it is crucial for citizen journalists to be responsible and strive to verify the accuracy of their reports before sharing them with others. By sharing their experiences and perspectives, citizen journalists can inspire others to engage within their communities and advocate for the changes they wish to see. This fosters democratic dialogue and creates a space for diverse ideas and solutions. Through an analysis of available literature, we will highlight the challenges in the relationship between citizen journalism and professional journalism.

Keywords: citizen journalism, responsibility, ethics, misinformation, public voice

Responsibility in Citizen Journalism: Challenges and Perspectives

Citizen Journalism - Concept and Definition

Citizen journalism represents a powerful tool that enables ordinary people to express their opinions, share information, and influence society through media. Radojković points out that “information has become a key factor of the modern world. It has become the most important production resource, a commodity that is increasingly traded, and the main source of power on a national and global scale” (Radojković, 2015). Instead of relying solely on professional journalists, citizen journalism gives everyone the opportunity to become part of the process of informing and shaping public opinion. The Internet has surpassed national borders and abolished

¹ Corresponding author: danica.popovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

² ORCID: 0009-0009-4883-3259

the concept of geographical distance, paving the way for global interaction. What is crucial is that the Internet and Internet-based platforms provide the possibility for every individual's voice to be heard. As Bogdanović states, "information has never before been as easily accessible and widespread as it is now. The development of technology and information-communication systems has changed the way we communicate, learn, work, spend our leisure time, and meet new people" (Bogdanović, 2013: 70). Furthermore, digital media has made information available to everyone, significantly reducing the control over information flows once held by large media corporations and traditional journalists. In this way, individuals are no longer merely passive consumers of information; they now have the opportunity to be active participants in content creation. This change has created space for the development of citizen journalism, which involves the media participation of those who do not have formal professional training but possess basic knowledge of using digital platforms. This feature is at the core of citizen journalism, as it allows anyone with access to appropriate technology and basic digital literacy to participate in public debate and content creation. As Kostanjevac states, "Cambridge Dictionary defines citizen journalism as journalism 'carried out by people who are not professional journalists but who disseminate information using websites, blogs, and social media'" (Kostanjevac, 2023: 4).

Krstić observes that today there are almost no media outlets in the world that, alongside their classic form, do not also have an online presence with multimedia content. "Also, today there are almost no media houses that do not allow citizens to participate in the exchange of opinions and attitudes on current events, or even in the creation of news itself" (Krstić, 2011: 110). In this way, the media not only inform but also create space for citizen participation in news creation and shaping. On the other hand, Sikirica adds that "digital development has led to significant changes in the media environment of the 21st century. Besides the way of communication, the way users consume media has also changed. Users increasingly want to have an active role in creating media content, leading to the emergence of new forms such as citizen journalism" (Sikirica, 2023: 2). Global connectivity has transformed the media landscape, as now anyone, without formal training, can not only follow but also create and distribute news worldwide, contributing to greater diversity of information and pluralism of opinions in the public sphere. Krstić notes the same, stating that today's technology enables every individual to independently create and distribute news globally through the Internet, something that was once a privilege of professional journalists and media organizations (Krstić, 2011: 110). Here, Krstić points out the significant transformation of the public sphere, where it is no longer necessary to be part of a media organization to participate in the creation of public discourse. Ravnjak also notes that "citizen journalism can also be defined as a type of first-person reporting in which individuals adopt or imitate the role of a professional journalist in order to participate in news creation" (Ravnjak, 2019: 2). This means that, instead of the formal, objective distance characteristic of traditional journalism, citizen journalism is characterized by individuals writing and reporting from their own perspective. This type of reporting can include personal views, as well as the

emotions of the individual engaged in citizen journalism. Although different from traditional journalism, this approach contributes to audience engagement, as it provides a more immediate view of the topic, closer to the everyday experiences of other people.

As Krstić further emphasizes, citizen journalism emerged as a response to the crisis of public communication. The contemporary practice of political communication adopted by the media diminishes citizens' knowledge of public affairs, discourages their political engagement, breeds mistrust in the government and political institutions, and adversely affects the conduct of political life (Krstić, 2011: 108). This means that traditional media increasingly succumb to political and commercial interests, leaving citizens often misinformed about important public issues. Citizen journalism, on the other hand, allows citizens to take an active role in informing. Jevtić provided another definition of this type of journalism, describing it as the simplest and most popular - "citizen journalism is a situation in which people, officially known as the audience, take up journalistic tools to inform each other" (Jevtić, 2016: 33). Citizen journalism, with its participatory nature, attempts to address the contemporary problems of the media by enabling citizens to be more actively involved in public discussions, either as recipients or creators of information.

Applying a communication perspective, Bogdanović states that citizen journalism is "a form of interactive mass communication in which the roles of communicator and recipient are alternately intertwined. In the online world, the media and journalists no longer have the exclusive right to access the public sphere, and their role as 'gatekeepers' is increasingly threatened by the networked, direct, and public communication enabled by access to the world wide web" (Bogdanović, 2013: 72). In the context of citizen journalism, this statement means that networked and immediate communication allows everyone to contribute to public discussions, bypassing traditional media filters and providing more authentic and diverse voices in the public sphere. Sikirica also notes the same, stating that information no longer reaches the audience in a one-sided manner; instead, communication occurs between the media and the audience (Sikirica, 2023: 7).

Another definition of citizen journalism can be taken from Bogdanović's description that it is "a concept of the modern era that involves the active participation of citizens in gathering, creating, analyzing, and disseminating information" (Bogdanović, 2013: 72). In addition to this definition, Sikirica provided an apt definition, stating that "citizen journalism, simply put, refers to a media concept that involves journalistic activities of average citizens" (Sikirica, 2023: 6). As Ravnjak explains, "the idea of citizen journalism is that people who are not trained to be professional journalists, independently or in collaboration with others, use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, amplify, or verify mainstream media" (Ravnjak, 2019: 3). Additionally, Krstić states that citizen journalism has created the possibility for "any citizen to take a photograph or video recording of certain events, people, and situations that deserve to be news" (Krstić, 2011: 109). Bogdanović observes that Internet users no longer need professional intermediaries to create, publish, and share messages. He views this as a facilitating

circumstance and adds that the widespread availability of computers, digital cameras, mobile phones with cameras, and Internet access has made it possible for anyone to be in the right place at the right time (Bogdanović, 2013: 70). In journalism, being in the right place at the right time means having the opportunity to capture an event in its essence, without later interpretations. When a citizen journalist is present at a key moment, they can provide a perspective that directly conveys the reality unfolding before them.

For clarification, Sikirica further lists some synonyms and similar expressions that refer to the same phenomenon—citizen journalism. “There are various other terms used for citizen journalism, such as ‘public journalism,’ ‘independent journalism,’ ‘network journalism,’ ‘open-source journalism,’ ‘collaborative journalism,’ ‘mass journalism,’ ‘community journalism,’ ‘network media,’ and so on” (Sikirica, 2023: 8). These terms illustrate how adaptable citizen journalism is and how it allows for different forms of citizen participation depending on context and technological capabilities. The common denominator for all these terms is the democratization of information sharing, where any individual can take on the role of a reporter or narrator. Sikirica also enumerates various manifestations of citizen journalism on the Internet. He mentions some examples of citizen journalism that we can find in the media—blogs, citizen media, citizen stories, collective interviews, comments, forums, and polls. Citizen media are photographs, videos, and audio recordings created by non-professional individuals and published in the media. “Citizen stories are written submissions by readers on current topics, including suggestions for news, which are then selected and edited by journalists for publication. Collective interviews are those interviews where questions are asked by readers, typically moderated by a professional journalist. Comments are various reviews of articles or other online items. Forums are Internet platforms where debates on various topics are initiated by citizens, while polls are current questions posed by journalists to which users are asked to provide multiple-choice or binary answers” (Sikirica, 2023: 8). These different forms of citizen journalism clearly demonstrate how significant and diverse the role of individuals in the digital space has become. All these forms of citizen journalism enrich the media space in their own way, providing the opportunity for information to be spread directly by the participants or witnesses of events themselves. It is precisely this opportunity for choice that citizen journalism offers that makes it an increasingly important segment of the contemporary media landscape.

Citizen Journalists - Definition, Classification, and Rights

Based on the above, it can be concluded that citizen journalists are ordinary people who use available technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones, to create and share journalistic content. They do not work for traditional media outlets but operate independently or as part of independent journalism projects. “Citizen journalists can be defined as individuals who are not professionally trained, yet still report on events in their surroundings and local community. Citizen journalists

or amateur reporters are nothing more than the audience, that is, viewers, readers, and listeners of mainstream media” (Sikirica, 2023: 7). Ravnjak provides a closer definition of individuals involved in citizen journalism, stating that “citizen journalists publish content related to various topics, often covering issues that are not reported by mainstream media. Citizen journalists generally have no hidden agendas; they simply wish to report on what they have witnessed” (Ravnjak, 2019: 5). This definition highlights the key motivation of citizen journalists, which differs from the professional media agendas. Citizen journalists often act out of a personal need to share information they deem important for their community, especially when traditional media neglect these topics for some reason. According to this interpretation, their role is particularly significant during times of crisis or when quick on-the-ground information is needed.

Husejnefendić offers an interesting and unusual definition of the term citizen journalist. “Once an audience, now a medium - this is a brief explanation of the phenomenon of citizen journalism” (Husejnefendić, 2016: 309). This brief but precise definition by Husejnefendić illustrates the fundamental change in the role of individuals in the media world. Once a passive audience, which could only consume content created by professional media, has now transformed into an active participant and creator of information. Citizen journalism blurs the boundaries between the audience and the media—the audience is no longer merely a consumer but also a content producer, creating and sharing information through digital platforms.

Vukojević and Vučetić have defined three groups of creators in citizen journalism.

1. **Accidental Journalists (Witnesses)** – According to these authors, the first group includes “individuals who collaborate with professional journalists by forwarding their raw content, such as photographs or videos from the scene, to newsrooms that then use them for their own media stories” (Vukojević, Vučetić, 2022: 14). The authors refer to these individuals as so-called accidental journalists or witnesses. Moreover, the content they create is also called “accidental journalistic work.” As the name suggests, “accidental journalists” find themselves on the scene unintentionally, usually as witnesses to an event. This group consists of individuals who unintentionally find themselves at the scene of an event, often in the role of witnesses (Vukojević, Vučetić, 2022: 14).
2. **Independent Citizen Journalists** – The second type of citizen involved in journalism is those who individually and freely publish content on their own network platforms. This type of journalism is what most of the public think of when they hear the term citizen journalism. Since the previous type were “accidental journalists,” the authors call this type of journalist “independent citizen journalists.” The topics they cover are not typically found in the everyday repertoire of traditional media (Vukojević, Vučetić, 2022: 14).
3. **Citizen Journalism Analysts** – The third group of citizen journalists

consists of those who use traditional media as resources for creating their own content. They are defined as individuals who spend their time following news, debates, and rumors from a wide range of sources. These citizens are valuable, according to the authors, because they confirm the importance of certain news through their commentary and analyses. Their contribution lies in analyzing and commenting on topics already covered by professional media. These citizen journalists thus confirm the significance of certain topics and contribute additional context and understanding through their analyses. They monitor media content, reprocess it, and present it differently, often adding their own stance or perspective on events.

The Democratic Nature of Citizen Journalism

The features of citizen journalism, such as promoting diversity of perspectives, encouraging active citizen participation, transparency, and accountability, are certainly democratic in principle. Citizen journalism allows the voices of ordinary people to be heard, free from editorial policies or corporate interests. This diversity of opinions ensures that perspectives that might not be featured in traditional media are heard, thereby enriching public debate and the democratic process. Instead of being passive consumers of information, people become active contributors in the process of informing.

Social networks, blogs, and online platforms allow anyone to express and share their opinions, experiences, and information with the public. This democratization of the media sphere empowers citizens to engage in public affairs, which is crucial for maintaining a vibrant democratic society. In this way, an open space for debate is created, which further contributes to the democratic process by allowing citizens to hear different arguments and perspectives, fostering informed decision-making. As Licitar states, “citizen journalism contributes to the democratization of society. This is especially important when it comes to censorship. Citizen and other independent media not only inform people but critically question various issues and make government actions more transparent” (Licitar, 2018: 6). Licitar emphasizes here that citizen journalists can provide alternative information that is crucial to the public. Through their activities, citizen journalists become the voice of the community. They address topics that traditional media ignore due to commercial interests.

Ravnjak states that “citizen journalists become advocates for democracy in countries where the political system prohibits the publication of relevant information or censors it, and sometimes even the only accurate source of news. Not only do citizen journalists publish news to inform the public, but they also critically examine social issues and activities carried out by the state” (Ravnjak, 2019: 5). Ravnjak’s analysis highlights the importance of citizen journalists as key actors in the fight for freedom of information in countries and societies where the media is under political control. In situations where official sources are limited or completely silenced, citizen journalists often become the only reliable channel for conveying truthful

information. Their role goes beyond merely reporting the news, as citizen journalists become not only informers but also defenders of democratic values.

Davidović says that “citizen journalism is an important defensive strategy against media manipulation, whose underdevelopment points to a passive, disinterested, and anxious public. Citizen journalism is a process of involving ‘ordinary citizens’ in creating and transmitting information to the media. Through the continuous engagement of the audience, media content becomes more diverse, balanced, and sensitive to marginalized members of society” (Davidović, 2020: 16). Davidović is essentially saying here that the media becomes less susceptible to political and commercial interests when citizens are active participants in creating media content.

Licitar also emphasizes that citizen journalism will be present in our society if certain conditions are met — “if the middle class is well developed, if they have available technological capacities, if the audience is dissatisfied with traditional media, and if they have the desire to be heard and listened to” (Licitar, 2018: 7). His premise clearly illustrates the framework within which citizen journalism can truly exist in its best form. A developed middle class is key because it usually possesses the resources and educational level that enable active participation in content creation. Additionally, available technological capacities, such as fast Internet and affordable devices, provide the foundation for creating and distributing information. Dissatisfaction with traditional media also plays a significant role as it motivates citizens to take the initiative in informing the public themselves. Through these conditions, citizen journalism can develop as a tool for community empowerment, allowing them to be informed in a way that is relevant and authentic to their experiences. On the other hand, freedom from censorship or regulatory restrictions gives citizen journalists the opportunity to report on topics they consider important, which may not be of interest to or acceptable for traditional media. Due to the absence of oversight, citizen journalism becomes a space for free exchange. Radojković specifically mentions that “the absence of oversight is beneficial for achieving greater freedom of expression, and this positively affects the recipients of information” (Radojković, 2015: 306).

Different forms of content, such as news, comments, and blogs, spread rapidly across the Internet, enabling different social groups to contribute to public discourse and present their perspectives. This process empowers individuals to become active creators of information rather than merely passive consumers. Krstić, considering this phenomenon, states that “citizen journalism is a form of development for modern society in which information is power; it is just a matter of how that power is distributed, not in whose hands it is—whether held by journalists or citizens, information in the form of news, comments, blogs, emails, newsletters, or forums spreads across the Internet at an unstoppable speed, illuminating all aspects of the society we live in” (Krstić, 2011: 109). In the era of digitalization, the boundaries between those who hold the power of information and those who receive information have become blurred. Power is no longer exclusively in the hands of professional journalists or media organizations. Thanks to digital media and the flourishing

development of technology, citizens are becoming key actors in creating and spreading information.

Radojković states that “the easy availability of information to anyone who is a networked world citizen has created in people a sense of communication freedom and participation in global events” (Radojković, 2015: 306). Networked citizens can comment on news, share information with their followers, and participate in debates happening on a global level. This contributes to a sense of participation and allows people to feel as though they have a voice in the global arena. Stamenković and Milenković interpret that “participation in public debate, with the development of new technologies, is available to everyone who is computer literate” (Stamenković, Milenković, 2014: 634). The interaction between citizen and professional journalism, as well as their synergy, contributes to creating a more comprehensive media landscape, providing a more complete picture of the event being reported. This collaboration has the potential to create a more diverse media space, offering higher quality information that results from both direct experience and professional investigation.

Sikirica says that an important aspect of citizen journalism is that it can complement professional reporting and indicate which topics need further investigation (Sikirica, 2023: 7). Citizen journalists bring topics from local communities or events of which they are direct witnesses, which professional media may be unable to cover due to limited resources or editorial priorities. Licitar similarly sees this potential collaboration between traditional and citizen journalism, noting that “citizens become contributors to the media, using different forms of information distribution. A term often used when explaining citizen journalism is ‘citizen media.’ Citizen media contribute to the diversity of media sources” (Licitar, 2018: 7).

Bogdanović adds how important a dialogical communication system is in the context of media pluralism. He states that citizen journalism thrives precisely because of the dialogue and discussion enabled by two-way communication, and the content created by users is popular due to its immediacy, personal tone, and individual experience (Bogdanović, 2013: 71). Ravnjak introduces the category of honesty into the discussion, stating that “citizen journalism today is increasingly perceived as a form of honest reporting conducted by citizens from anywhere” (Ravnjak, 2019: 6). By introducing this new category, Ravnjak further emphasizes the perception of citizen journalism as an authentic and sincere form of reporting. This type of reporting is raw and offers direct depictions of events without the mediation of editorial policies.

Bogdanović further says that the emergence of citizen journalism “corresponds with the strengthening of democratic aspirations and ambitions in traditional societies, accompanied by civic activism, the reaffirmation of the concept of participatory democracy, the expansion of economic freedoms into the social, political, and cultural spheres, and a new communication situation enabled by the emergence and development of the Internet, primarily Web 2.0 and the widespread availability of modern digital communication devices” (Ravnjak, 2019: 6). This phenomenon is significant in societies that are transitioning towards greater democratization, as

citizen journalism allows for critical thinking and gives a voice to those who were previously marginalized or silenced in any way.

Licitar also points out that “citizen involvement in the news process breaks down media hegemony. This means that citizen journalism contributes to media pluralism. Moreover, citizens do not have hidden agendas; they are merely reporting on what they see and experience” (Licitar, 2018: 9). This implies that traditional media, such as television, radio, and print media, have, until recently, held full dominance in the process of creating and distributing news. On the other hand, citizen involvement in news creation challenges the established media hegemony, allowing information to come from diverse sources. When citizens take on the role of journalists, they create alternative narratives, making media hegemony, which entails control over information, increasingly difficult to maintain. This opens up space for a critical examination of everything presented in the media. Licitar also notes that this type of journalism is “a response to mainstream traditional media, which often neglect public interests and have biased portrayals of events and news. The two main elements that can be seen in these definitions are: the public begins to create content, and this content is a response to the shortcomings of professional journalism” (Licitar, 2018: 9).

Sikirica further emphasizes that “citizen journalism has enabled people to raise their voices about issues they believe deserve more attention” (Sikirica, 2023: 7). Krstić, on the same topic, states that “the goal of citizens’ participatory role is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, and relevant information, which is the foundation of every democratic society. Citizens participating in this process want to investigate an event or provide information from the scene of an event, the kind of information that major media might overlook” (Krstić, 2011: 110). Thus, citizen journalism serves as a corrective to traditional media, providing alternative sources of information and enabling communities to be informed about issues relevant to them.

Davidović says that developed citizen journalism is largely attributed to a deliberative political culture and a tendency toward democratic progress (Davidović, 2020: 16). Deliberative processes involving discussions and dialogues allow citizens to feel like important actors in political life. The same author notes that media content is increasingly enriched with diversity, balance, and sensitivity toward marginalized sections of society, all thanks to the constant contributions of the audience—that is, the citizens. Citizen journalism can also be defined as the mobilization of ordinary people, or amateur citizens, who play an active role in their community and the media they consume (Davidović, 2020: 16). Krstić recognizes the connection between citizens’ political participation and the role played by citizen journalists.

He emphasizes that citizen journalists are not merely neutral observers but are often personally engaged in the issues they report on. “Citizen journalists are often active in certain movements, local initiatives, or non-governmental organizations, and even political parties” (Krstić, 2011: 108). Such an approach allows citizen journalists to provide insight into events from the perspective of a participant, rather than just as an external observer.

Licitar concludes his considerations by stating that “citizen journalism has its positive characteristics and roles in society, such as informing or educating the public, contributing to a more vibrant democracy, and making every action and event more transparent” (Licitar, 2018: 11). In this way, knowledge is spread among wider layers of the population, and critical thinking is strengthened. These characteristics together make citizen journalism an important factor in building an open and participatory society, ready to face the challenges of today.

Professional Media and Citizen Journalism

The growth of alternative news sources has, on one hand, created a more diverse media landscape, while on the other, it has posed numerous challenges in reporting that have the potential to become problematic. First and foremost, alternative media are not subject to the same standards of journalistic ethics and fact-checking as traditional media. This can lead to the spread of misinformation and fake news. Blogs, podcasts, and social media often rely on subjective opinions and perspectives, which can jeopardize the objectivity and reliability of the information reaching a wider audience.

Another issue with alternative sources of information is their fragmentation. Today, citizens often choose to follow those sources that align with their personal views, creating an “echo chamber” effect. In such an environment, people are more likely to receive only those pieces of information that confirm their existing worldview. Sikirica recognizes some of these challenges and says, “traditional media are no longer the only way of informing, and they face significant competition from alternative news sources such as blogs, podcasts, audiovisual clips, and social media. Many researchers precisely identify shortcomings in this type of journalism” (Sikirica, 2023: 2). Jevtić, in the same tone, points out the key elements that separate these two concepts, professional journalism and citizen journalism, or these two modes of informing, or more precisely, these two types of participation in information dissemination—responsibility and reliability (Jevtić, 2016: 33). Citizen journalism has sparked many debates and stirred the perception of traditional, i.e., professional journalism. Despite a growing number of supporters of this trend, there is also an increasing number of those who oppose it.

Roberts lists the aspects by which citizen journalism differs from professional journalism. The first is that citizen journalists do not work from a newsroom but report from anywhere, often from the comfort of their own home. Another difference mentioned is the use of amateur multimedia devices and the dissemination of unverified information. Ethical practice is also an issue; citizen journalists do not adhere to it, and there is no regulation, no so-called filters, and gatekeepers (Roberts, 2019: 412). As Krstić notes, the most frequent critics of citizen journalism are precisely professional journalists, that is, “individuals who have a university degree in journalism or have received professional training elsewhere for this job, so based on their knowledge and skills, they have a detailed understanding of the profession and can properly fulfill their journalistic duties” (Krstić, 2011: 111). Matović

observes that “the professionalism of journalists is qualified by journalism standards and ethics, established during the dominance of traditional media” (Matović, 2012: 141).

Radojković sees a problem in the lack of knowledge of the journalistic code by citizen journalists. He says that “the problem lies in the fact that they do not know the agreed rules and therefore do not consider their application, which is necessary for respecting the dignity of others. On the other hand, professional journalists are obliged to adhere to the code of professional ethics” (Radojković, 2015: 309). Here, Radojković points out a fundamental problem in citizen journalism—while professional journalists are responsible for adhering to ethical standards that encompass categorical values like accuracy and impartiality, citizen journalists are often unfamiliar with these rules or do not consider them binding. This can lead to situations where individuals’ rights are not respected and unverified or sensationalist information is spread.

Davidović expresses the same concern, stating that “it is questionable whether the information gathered by citizens is valid if it is not based on the foundations of professional journalism, learned in journalism education. The information published by the media undergoes a series of filters shaped by professional principles, whereas in citizen journalism the reverse logic applies—‘publish first, then filter’” (Davidović, 2020: 22). Bogdanović notes the importance of the role of editors and the verification of each piece of information, stating that “this gives credibility, but significantly reduces the effectiveness of official media when it comes to sudden and crisis situations where the speed of reporting is imperative” (Bogdanović, 2013: 71).

Sikirica states that “some consider citizen journalists to be ‘an unpaid version of professional journalists’ who still respect the rules of the profession, while others argue that citizen journalists are those who do not have the time to fully deliver a story or lack the technical skills to create a coherent narrative” (Sikirica, 2023: 8). This view recognizes the value of citizen journalism as a supplement to professional journalism, especially in situations where professional journalists are unable to cover certain events. The challenge remains how to ensure that citizen journalists have access to the necessary tools and knowledge to make their stories as high-quality as possible, thereby reducing the gap between professional and citizen reporting.

However, as Bogdanović emphasizes, “professional journalists criticize citizen journalism because they believe it lacks quality, that amateurs are unable to separate important facts from trivial ones, and that such journalism is too personal” (Bogdanović, 2013: 72). Despite these criticisms, citizen journalism offers a valuable perspective that is often beyond the reach of traditional media. Sikirica says that “it is risky to fully rely on their information, given that they generally do not adhere to the rules of multiple fact-checking. Therefore, such information should always be verified additionally” (Sikirica, 2023: 8).

Krstić states that “unlike traditional media, where the filtering process is hierarchical and information undergoes assessment before being published, on the Internet every piece of information is made available to everyone, with filtering occurring through the self-regulatory mechanisms of the Internet itself” (Krstić,

2011: 109). The hierarchical process mentioned by the author ensures accuracy but often limits the types of information that will be available, depending on editorial policy, media ownership interests, or political pressure. On the other hand, on the Internet, every piece of information is immediately available to the wider public, with filtering occurring in a different way—through self-regulatory mechanisms such as user comments, content ratings, sharing, and the like.

Radojković further discusses the importance of information sources in the verification process, stating that “in professional journalism, rumors rarely pass because it is impossible to determine the source of this type of information, and without a source, they cannot be credible. Facts and data published by the media and professional journalists must be verified, not products of imagination or assumptions” (Radojković, 2015: 309). This means that professional journalists understand their duty is to provide accurate, impartial, and informative content, which involves avoiding sensationalism and the spread of misinformation.

Citizen journalists, who often publish information in real time without prior source verification, can frequently lead to the dissemination of unverified or incorrect information. In a similar tone, Sikirica says that “the biggest difference is that citizen journalists do not answer to anyone, are not bound by any contract, and do not have an owner. This fact can be considered an advantage as they do not have to fear being fired, having their salary reduced, or facing any other consequences” (Sikirica, 2023: 12). This independence further allows citizen journalists to freely express their views and cover topics that might not be addressed in traditional media.

Radojković states that “the lack of control is simultaneously a normative gap that can be exploited in a harmful way. Often anonymous, a communicator in citizen journalism can always abuse their autonomy. At their own discretion, they can send misinformation into the public space, spread rumors and gossip, present their imagination and fantasies as facts, fabricate data that suits their needs, etc.” (Radojković, 2015: 310). Since they are not subject to the same professional standards and information verification as professional journalists, citizen journalists have greater freedom to present their fantasies and subjective views as facts. This kind of unverified or incorrect information can have serious consequences for society and individuals, including spreading panic, damaging the reputation of individuals or institutions, and undermining democratic processes.

Jevtić emphasizes that “supporters of citizen journalism, apart from taking the good intentions of ordinary citizens as an axiom, often argue against the notion that a professional journalist is separable from their own biases, as well as the idea that the politics of their reporting are shaped by political and economic groups that have influence over the media organization they work for, i.e., that professional journalism is conducted under the watchful eyes of those in power, media magnates, and their political allies” (Jevtić, 2016: 33). In this context, citizen journalism is seen as a counterbalance to professional journalism, which operates under such constraints. According to supporters of this approach, citizen journalists are able to report without pressure and censorship. Unlike conventional media institutions that operate as hierarchically organized structures based on profitability, citizen

journalism encourages the formation of connected communities that prioritize dialogue, cooperation, and equality among participants.

Krstić points out that it is necessary to be careful and insist on the distinction between citizen and professional journalism, despite all the advantages that citizen journalism brings. “Regardless of the current position of the media, whom they serve, in whose interest they work, and how they report, citizen journalism should not be equated with, surpass, or supplant professional journalism. Professional journalists are first and foremost trained for the job and are guided by certain ethical norms and professional standards, whether they work in electronic media—radio or television—or online media” (Krstić, 2011: 109).

Radojković particularly emphasizes that professional journalists adhere to certain ethical norms and professional standards, which is extremely important to avoid manipulation. Ethical norms include respecting principles such as truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in reporting. “Communicators in citizen journalism are ethical to the extent that they are as individuals, as bearers of social roles in everyday life” (Radojković, 2015: 310). The same author, in favor of citizen journalism, points out that values such as transparency, quality, ethics, and responsibility are sometimes merely nominal advantages of professional journalism over citizen journalism. “For these values to become advantages that will allow the journalism profession to survive in the information society, it is necessary for all its principles to be implemented in practice” (Radojković, 2015: 310).

However, like professional journalists, citizen journalists should also be aware of certain ethical values that can influence their civic duty. Although they do not have to work as professional journalists, citizen journalists should respect ethical guidelines. Some of the ethical values that Ravnjak (2019) suggests citizen journalists should adhere to are “maximizing and efficiently minimizing harm, that is, evaluating the public interest against the harm that could result from publishing information” (Ravnjak, 2019: 6). As the author emphasizes, they should present facts, offering what they have truly seen without speculation, rumors, and conjectures. Moreover, they should never plagiarize or manipulate video and photographs. In conclusion, “a citizen journalist must be transparent and identify every possible conflict of interest” (Ravnjak, 2019: 6).

These values help ensure that citizen journalism is credible and contributes to social well-being, rather than causing potential negative consequences. This means that citizen journalists must be aware of the potential impacts that the information they publish could have on individuals and the community. Rumors and speculations can easily turn into misinformation, which can harm individuals. It is essential that the content be authentic and presented in a way that is true to what actually happened. Adhering to ethical standards such as minimizing harm, accuracy, avoiding manipulation, and transparency is crucial for maintaining public trust in citizen journalists. If citizen journalists follow these guidelines, their reporting can be a valuable tool for shedding light on topics that mainstream media might overlook, thus contributing to the plurality of information and strengthening democracy.

Conclusion

Analyzing the technological changes that have led to the rise of citizen journalism, this work further highlights the broader social changes that have enabled every individual to become an active participant in the process of informing and shaping public opinion. The technological revolution, particularly the development of the Internet and digital platforms, has transformed the existing media structure and opened the door to new actors in the sphere of public information. In this dynamic, citizen journalism takes on a particularly important role, as it contributes to the democratization of information and the decentralization of power that was once reserved only for professional media and journalists. Citizen journalism becomes a platform for marginalized or neglected voices, allowing them to be heard and to contribute to shaping social reality. Citizen journalists, whether in the role of witnesses to events or active participants in their communities, provide authentic stories and perspectives that traditional media often overlook or insufficiently cover.

However, while citizen journalism brings many advantages, we cannot ignore the challenges it faces. The lack of formal education, ethics, and training among many citizen journalists creates room for unverified information and misinformation. Professional media undergo editorial filtering and verification systems that ensure accuracy and reliability in reporting, whereas citizen journalism is more devoid of such structures. This means that the information created by citizens often relies on individual perspectives, which can lead to issues such as misinterpretation of events, unverified rumors, and even direct manipulation.

One of the greatest challenges citizen journalism faces is precisely the lack of mechanisms for verifying the accuracy of information. Without editorial teams and checks, there is a significant risk of spreading information that is not credible, which can lead to public misinformation and the creation of false narratives. In addition, the expansion of citizen journalism can contribute to public polarization, as citizens, guided by personal perceptions and beliefs, often report from subjective perspectives, emphasizing aspects that are personally significant to them while neglecting other aspects that are crucial for objective understanding.

Despite these challenges, citizen journalism plays a key role in the democratization of the media space and contributes to strengthening participatory democracy. Its power lies in its ability to amplify the voices of ordinary people and provide an alternative version of reality that is not always available through the lens of traditional media. Citizen journalism brings to light stories and topics that are neglected or suppressed due to commercial interests, political pressures, or editorial guidelines followed by professional media. One of the key aspects of citizen journalism, according to many authors, is its role in creating platforms for dialogue and information exchange.

To overcome the challenges faced by citizen journalism, it is crucial to introduce education in media literacy, which would provide citizens with basic knowledge about ethics, fact-checking, and responsible reporting. In addition to education, the development of digital tools for verifying the credibility of information can play a

key role in reducing the risk of spreading fake news and misinformation. Only in this way can citizen journalism, despite its shortcomings, become a valuable resource for democratic society. Its ability to empower citizens, create space for diverse voices, and contribute to pluralism, a rich dialogue, and the building of a more inclusive media space makes it an indispensable element of modern information dissemination.

Through education and the application of ethical principles, citizen journalism can continue to be a powerful tool for promoting transparency, empowering communities, and spreading diversity of opinion, thereby directly contributing to building a stronger and healthier democracy.

Literature

- Bogdanović, J. (2013). Citizen Journalism in Serbia. *CM - Journal for Communication Management*, 8(28), 69-88. <https://doi.org/10.5937/comman1328069B>
- Davidović, J. (2020). Activism as Defense: Citizen Journalism and Its Correlates on the Example of the Student Population in Montenegro. *Digital Media Technologies and Socio-Educational Changes*, 9-71.
- Husejefendić, Š. (2016). Citizen Journalism vs. Professional Media in Crisis Situations. *DHS - Social and Humanistic Studies: Journal of the Faculty of Philosophy in Tuzla*, 1(1), 307-326.
- Jevtić, M. B. (2016). Citizen and Professional Journalism in Media in the Republic of Serbia (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Belgrade.
- Kostanjevac, T. (2023). Virtues and Misconceptions of Citizen Journalism (Doctoral dissertation). University North, University Centre Koprivnica, Department of Journalism.
- Krštić, A. R. (2011). Citizen Journalism – Opportunities and Challenges for the Journalism Profession. *CM Communication and Media*, 6(20), 97-115.
- Licitar, J. (2018). Citizen Journalism (Doctoral dissertation). University of Zagreb, Department of Croatian Studies.
- Matović, M. (2012). Journalism and Media Industry in Serbia: Struggle for Maintaining Professionalism. *CM Communication and Media*, 7(24), 133-149.
- Radojković, M. (2015). Will Citizen Journalism Replace Professional Journalism?. In *Political Identity of Serbia in the Global and Regional Context* (pp. 305-314). Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade.
- Ravnjak, K. (2019). Citizen Journalism (Doctoral dissertation). University North, University Centre Koprivnica, Department of Journalism.
- Roberts, J. (2019). The Erosion of Ethics: From Citizen Journalism to Social Media. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 17(4), 409-421.
- Sikirica, S. (2023). Citizen Journalism: Amateurism or a Profession of the New Digital Age? (Doctoral dissertation). University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies.
- Stamenković, S., & Milenković, V. (2014). Journalism Between Serving the Public and Catering to Audience Taste. *In medias res: Journal of Media Philosophy*, 3(5), 630-648.

Odgovornost u građanskom novinarstvu: Izazovi i perspektive

Danica Popović, Filozofski fakultet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

U današnjem digitalnom dobu, mobilne tehnologije konstantno oblikuju načine na koje se informacije šire i konzumiraju. Građansko novinarstvo postalo je sveprisutno zahvaljujući društvenim mrežama, blogovima i platformama za deljenje sadržaja. To otvara mogućnost da svako postane novinar, bez obzira na profesionalno iskustvo ili obrazovanje. Dok profesionalni novinari često prolaze kroz procese uređivanja i filtriranja informacija, građanski novinari mogu direktno u realnom vremenu deliti svoja mišljenja i iskustva. Ovo može dovesti do bržeg širenja vesti i bržih reakcija na aktuelne događaje. Međutim, važno je biti svestan izazova koje nosi građansko novinarstvo. S obzirom na to da svako može postati izvor informacija, postoji rizik od širenja neproverenih informacija. Stoga je ključno da građanski novinari budu odgovorni i da nastoje da provere tačnost svojih izveštaja pre nego što ih podele sa drugima. Deljenjem svojih iskustava i perspektiva, građanski novinari mogu inspirisati druge da se angažuju u svojim zajednicama i zalažu za promene koje žele da vide. To podstiče demokratski dijalog i stvara prostor za raznolike ideje i rešenja. Kroz analizu dostupne literature, istaknućemo izazove u odnosu između građanskog i profesionalnog novinarstva.

Ključne reči: građansko novinarstvo, odgovornost, etika, dezinformacije

Received: 15th September 2024

Revision received: 24th October 2024

Accepted: 2nd November 2024

For MSAE Archive visit our website:
<https://izdanja.filfak.ni.ac.rs/casopisi/media-studies-and-applied-ethics>

For additional information and paper submission visit our website:
<https://msae.rs/index.php/home>

MEDIA STUDIES AND APPLIED ETHICS

V/2 (2024)

Publisher

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ

For the Publisher

Natalija Jovanović, PhD, Dean

Publishing Unit Coordinator

Sanja Ignjatović, PhD, Vice-Dean for Science and Research

Proofreading

Marija Stojković

Technical Editorial Office

Darko Jovanović (Cover Design)
Milan D. Randelović (Technical Editing)
Publishing unit (Digital Publishing)

Format

17 x 24 cm

Press

SCERO PRINT

Print run

10

Niš, 2024

ISSN 2683-5355

CIP - Каталогизacija y publikaciji
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

316.77

MEDIA studies and applied ethics / editor-in chief
Andrej Blagojević. - Vol. 1, no. 1 (2020)- . - Niš :
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, 2020- (Niš :
Scero print). - 24 cm Polugodišnje.

ISSN 2683-5355 = Media studies and applied ethics

COBISS.SR-ID 283297804