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Social Media and the Deliberative Disintegration of Political Communication: Citizen-Candidate Dynamics on Facebook During Electoral Campaigns[1]

Adriana Ștefănel[23], Associate Professor, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of citizen-candidate communication on Facebook during the 2024 local elections in Bucharest, focusing on how digital platforms shape political discourse and civic engagement. Using content analysis, it examines the campaign strategies of three major contenders—Nicușor Dan, Gabriela Firea, and Cristian Popescu-Piedone—highlighting patterns of policy framing, negative campaigning, populist rhetoric, and the interplay between emotional and factual appeals. In parallel, the analysis investigates voter interactions, assessing engagement intensity, discursive diversity, incivility, and ideological polarization. Findings reveal that instead of fostering inclusive deliberation, Facebook acted as a catalyst for deliberative disintegration, amplifying fragmentation, reinforcing echo chambers, and undermining democratic resilience. The results raise important questions about the platform's role in shaping public discourse and the quality of electoral communication in algorithmically curated environments.

Keywords: affective polarization, deliberative disintegration, incivility online, political communication on Facebook, populist rhetoric

Introduction

The rise of social media has significantly transformed political communication, reshaping the interaction between politicians and citizens. Digital platforms have dismantled traditional barriers to political engagement, offering individuals unprecedented access to public discourse, a space for opinion-sharing, and tools for mobilization (Shane, 2004). Advocates of digital democracy highlight these changes

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[2] Corresponding author: director.antropologie@fjsc.ro

[3] ORCID: 0000-0003-3050-0631

as positive, arguing that social media fosters deliberative dialogue and enhances inclusivity by amplifying marginalized voices. Loader and Mercea (2011) as well as Momoc (2014) describe this transformation as technological empowerment, emphasizing the potential of digital tools to broaden democratic participation and civic engagement.

Several global political events illustrate this perspective. The Arab Spring demonstrated how platforms like Facebook and Twitter became tools of political activism, enabling protesters to coordinate demonstrations, bypass state-controlled media, and initiate large-scale political change in the Middle East (Howard & Hussain, 2013). Similarly, Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns showcased social media's potential for mobilizing young voters, fundraising, and efficiently disseminating campaign messages (Kreiss, 2016). In Romania, Klaus Iohannis' unexpected victory in the 2014 elections was largely attributed to social media's role in activating the diaspora and shaping electoral outcomes (Marincea, 2015).

Despite these optimistic views, the role of social media in democracy remains highly contested. A Pew Research Center study (2022) found that while many citizens acknowledge social media's democratic potential, concerns over misinformation, polarization, and digital platform manipulation have intensified, particularly in the United States.

While social media has facilitated broader civic engagement, it has also provided an environment where populist rhetoric, polarizing narratives, and extremist ideologies thrive. The same mechanisms that facilitate free political expression also contribute to the spread of disinformation and manipulation, raising questions about social media's long-term impact on democratic stability.

Beyond misinformation, social media can also distort electoral processes; politically driven digital platforms influence democratic decision-making show that confirmation biases on social media contribute to slower political learning and increased polarization. Scarano et al. (2024) highlight how Twitter-based electoral polls during the 2020 United States presidential election were manipulated by inauthentic activity, reinforcing conspiracy theories about voter fraud.

The role of digital propaganda and automated bots in political fragmentation is equally concerning. Robles et al. (2024) examine how bots were deployed during Spain's COVID-19 crisis to escalate political tensions and incivility. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Ferrara et al. (2016) and Howard et al. (2018), who document how computational propaganda amplifies misinformation and manipulates public opinion.

These studies highlight the darker implications of social media. While digital platforms have created new opportunities for participation and discourse, they also pose substantial risks to electoral integrity, political cohesion, and democratic stability (Păuş & Ştefănel, 2016). Understanding these challenges requires a nuanced analysis of how social media interacts with political processes and how regulatory measures could mitigate its most harmful effects.

Deliberative Democracy, Populism, and Political Polarization in the Digital Age

The rise of social media has sparked debates about its impact on democratic processes. A key question arises: Does social media promote deliberative democracy—where diverse perspectives engage in rational discourse—or does it amplify populism and polarization through emotional appeals, disinformation, and algorithmic biases?

Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere provides a theoretical foundation for deliberative democracy. In "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (1962), Habermas defines the public sphere as a space for rational-critical debate, where individuals discuss public matters free from state or economic interference. This idealized model emphasizes reason, inclusivity, and equality, facilitating legitimate democratic decision-making through open dialogue. Deliberative democracy, rooted in this theory, envisions a system where public reasoning—not just voting or majoritarian rule—determines political legitimacy.

Unlike aggregative democratic models, which emphasize vote-counting, deliberative democracy prioritizes the quality of discourse. It requires political arguments to undergo scrutiny, counterarguments, and rational debate before reaching a consensus. The legitimacy of democratic decisions depends on the inclusiveness and rationality of public deliberation. However, deliberative democracy assumes that public debate is free from manipulation, coercion, and emotional distortions—a condition often compromised in digital environments.

Populism: A Conceptual Overview

Populism is commonly understood as a discourse that divides society into two antagonistic groups: the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite." This binary opposition is central to populist rhetoric, which portrays elites as disconnected from ordinary citizens and seeks to reclaim political power for the "true" will of the people. Scholars such as Canovan (1999) and Kazin (1995) highlight the persuasive nature of populism, arguing that it functions primarily as a rhetorical strategy rather than a coherent ideological framework.

Populism is often associated with anti-establishment sentiments, emotional appeals, and crisis narratives that simplify complex political issues (Ștefănel, 2016). Müller (2016) argues that populist actors claim to exclusively represent the will of the people, positioning their opponents as illegitimate or even as enemies of democracy. This exclusionary approach contributes to political polarization, reinforcing "us versus them" narratives that erode democratic consensus-building.

The Role of Social Media in Populist Mobilization

The affinity between social media and populist rhetoric has been well-documented. Unlike traditional media, which serves as a gatekeeper, digital platforms allow populist leaders to communicate directly with their supporters, circumventing

institutional filters. Social media enables the construction of an "authentic" political persona, enhancing populists' appeal by creating a sense of direct and unmediated engagement.

Empirical studies confirm that populist movements are particularly adept at leveraging social media for mobilization. Moreover, digital platforms facilitate the formation of online echo chambers, where users are exposed primarily to like-minded opinions, reinforcing ideological divisions. Social media algorithms prioritize content that elicits strong emotional reactions, which often means amplifying populist and extremist discourse while suppressing moderate viewpoints. This phenomenon contributes to an environment where political debates become increasingly adversarial rather than deliberative.

Research Question and Empirical Investigation

The role of social media in democracy presents an empirical challenge: how does it function in real electoral contexts, particularly in societies experiencing democratic consolidation and political fragmentation? This study addresses this question by analyzing the 2024 local elections in Bucharest, investigating whether Facebook functioned as a deliberative space or as a platform for populist mobilization and polarization. Given Facebook's dominant role in Romania's digital landscape, it serves as the primary venue for political communication, where candidates and voters interact, exchange ideas, and engage in discussions.

RQ1: How has Facebook shaped political communication and voter engagement in the 2024 Bucharest local elections?

RQ2: Does Facebook foster deliberative democracy by encouraging rational debate and participation, or does it amplify populist rhetoric and political polarization?

Empirical Analysis: Political Discourse and Engagement on Facebook

This study systematically examines how the three most relevant candidates in the 2024 Bucharest local elections framed their campaign discourse on Facebook and how voters engaged with their posts through comments. The analysis focuses on two primary dimensions: the nature of campaign discourse and the dynamics of voter interaction, both of which are crucial in assessing whether social media fosters deliberative democracy or exacerbates populism and polarization.

Campaign Discourse: Framing of Political Messages

One of the central aspects of this study is the way candidates structured their campaign messages on Facebook. A deliberative democratic environment encourages fact-based discussions, promotes substantive policy debates, and prioritizes rational arguments over emotionally charged rhetoric. In contrast, a populist and polarized environment is more likely to be dominated by negative campaigning, anti-elitist discourse, and emotionally driven appeals.

The analysis of campaign discourse will focus on the following key indicators:

Table 1: Analytical Framework: Evaluating Campaign Rhetoric in the Digital Public Sphere

Indicator	Description	Measurement Criteria
Policy-Oriented Content	Posts discussing concrete policies, programs, and governance strategies.	Ratio of fact-based vs. vague/ emotional rhetoric.
Negative Campaigning	Posts attacking political opponents instead of presenting constructive proposals.	Ratio of negative vs. positive campaign messages.
Use of Populist Rhetoric	Simplistic messaging, anti-elitism, and "people vs. elite" narratives.	Frequency of populist keywords (e.g., "corrupt elite," "betrayal of the people").
Fact-Based vs. Emotional Appeals	Emphasis on rational argumentation vs. emotional triggers.	Ratio of fact-based statements vs. emotionally charged language.

By examining these elements, the study will determine whether the 2024 Bucharest local election campaign on Facebook was primarily issue-driven or if it followed the global trend of increasingly emotionalized and populist digital political communication.

Voter Engagement and Interaction: Nature of Facebook Discussions

Beyond candidate discourse, the study also evaluates the nature of voter interactions on Facebook. While social media offers the potential for deliberative engagement, online discussions are often shaped by confirmation bias, ideological echo chambers, and incivility. The ability of social media platforms to facilitate meaningful political debate depends on whether they foster constructive, multi-perspective discussions or whether they serve as closed environments that reinforce pre-existing biases and hostility toward opposing views.

This analysis includes the following key indicators of voter engagement:

Table 2: Key Metrics of Civic Engagement and Polarization in Online Campaign Discussions

Indicator	Description	Measurement Criteria
Level of Engagement	Volume of likes, shares, and comments per post.	Engagement rate per candidate/ topic.
Diversity of Interactions	Meaningful debate vs. one-sided support/opposition.	Ratio of constructive comments vs. partisan reinforcement.
Incivility in Discussions	Presence of hate speech, insults, and derogatory language.	Frequency of toxic comments.
Echo Chambers & Polarization	Extent to which comments reflect ideological rigidity rather than dialogue.	Proportion of reinforcing opinions vs. counterarguments.

This study examined the campaign discourse and voter engagement on the official Facebook pages of three key candidates:

Nicuşor Dan – the incumbent mayor, supported by USR, a party in opposition at the national level at the time.

Gabriela Firea – former mayor of Bucharest (2016-2020), defeated by Nicuşor Dan in the previous elections, and backed by PSD, the governing social-democratic party. However, at the time of the election, Firea was embroiled in internal conflicts within her party's leadership.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone – a controversial political figure and former mayor of Sector 5, forced to resign following the Colectiv nightclub fire tragedy (2015), in which over 60 young people lost their lives due to safety violations linked to suspected corruption in the issuance of permits. After serving time in prison, he was later rehabilitated by the judiciary and sought a political comeback.

Given these candidates' distinct political backgrounds and public perceptions, their Facebook campaigns and interactions with voters provide a rich context for examining whether social media functioned as a space for deliberative democracy or as a vehicle for populism and polarization.

Data Collection and Methodology

This study examines Facebook posts and user comments from the final week of the electoral campaign, a period marked by heightened political engagement and intensified messaging strategies. The analysis employs content analysis, systematically coding both candidate posts and user interactions to identify patterns in political communication.

To ensure a structured and objective approach, we applied the analytical grid detailed earlier, evaluating campaign discourse (policy-oriented messaging, populist rhetoric, emotional vs. fact-based appeals) and voter engagement (incivility, diversity of perspectives, presence of echo chambers). To enhance accuracy and depth, we utilized NVivo software, which enabled qualitative and quantitative text analysis, facilitating the categorization of themes, sentiment analysis, and keyword mapping.

Through this methodological framework, the study aims to determine whether candidates engaged voters through rational debate and substantive policy discussions or whether their digital campaigns were primarily driven by negative messaging, populist appeals, and emotionally charged narratives. Additionally, we systematically assessed the nature of voter interactions, examining whether Facebook functioned as a space for deliberative democratic engagement or whether it reinforced ideological polarization and entrenched partisan divisions.

Findings

Policy-Oriented Content

The analysis of the candidates' Facebook posts between June 1 and June 7, 2024, reveals significant differences in the extent to which their messages were policy-oriented. Nicușor Dan displayed the most structured and fact-based communication, emphasizing governance strategies and urban development projects and demonstrated the most consistent use of fact-based, structured communication. His posts frequently detailed public investments in infrastructure and urban development, such as the rehabilitation of tramway line 5, the modernization of the heating network, and the prevention of illegal constructions. In one such post, he announced: we are rehabilitating tramway line 5 and upgrading the heating system in several neighborhoods. European funds are allocated and each technical stage is monitored.".

This type of messaging, rich in institutional and technical language, stood in sharp contrast with emotionally charged or populist slogans. Another post emphasized his governance focus: "Work on the heating network is progressing according to schedule. We are continuing the initiated projects". These examples illustrate a discursive strategy rooted in public accountability and structured planning. Emotional content was minimal and context-specific. Posts marking symbolic occasions, such as Children's Day, included simple acknowledgements: "Happy Children's Day! May your day be full of smiles!", but such expressions remained peripheral to the core campaign messaging.

In contrast to Nicușor Dan's highly structured and policy-centered approach, Gabriela Firea combined vague references to governance experience with emotionally resonant appeals. While she frequently cited past achievements in healthcare and infrastructure, such as the construction of medical units or support for families, these mentions were typically broad and lacked detailed implementation plans or timelines. Few posts provided concrete policy updates or budgetary data, limiting their contribution to deliberative public discourse.

Instead, Firea's communication was heavily oriented toward emotional connection and community mobilization. Her posts often used warm, empathic language and symbolic expressions of unity. For example, in one post she wrote: "Family is our balance, it is our soul ❤️ […] Happy anniversary, wonderful family!". This emotionally charged message illustrates how personal values and affective themes were central to her digital rhetoric.

Supporter engagement echoed this tone through affirmations like *"Good luck with everything you set out to do!* 🙏❤️*"* or simply *"*❤️❤️❤️*"*, reinforcing the emotive register of her communication". These interactions contributed to a campaign atmosphere shaped more by symbolic belonging than by deliberative, policy-oriented discussion.

As a result, Firea's campaign discourse displayed a moderate level of policy content but was dominated by emotionally evocative appeals that resonated deeply with her audience and prioritized collective identification over technical specificity.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone adopted a markedly different communicative approach, relying heavily on personal credibility and emotional bonding rather than structured policy communication. His posts centered on his image as an experienced doer, often showcasing localized urban achievements such as the renovation of *Parcul Sebastian* or initiatives in social housing. However, these references were largely declarative and lacked supporting data, timelines, or references to administrative frameworks.

Unlike Nicușor Dan's institutional focus or Firea's collective appeals, Piedone's discourse revolved around his personal strength and the trust of "the people." Governance was portrayed not as a coordinated system, but as the result of individual will and dedication. This personalization was strongly reinforced through emotionally charged supporter comments, such as *"The ultimate boss!!"* focusing admiration not on programmatic content, but on perceived character and charisma.

The overall tone of his campaign was celebratory, informal, and affectively rich. His posts were frequently accompanied by emojis such as 💪 (strength), ❤️ (support), and 🤝 (trust). Supporters responded in kind, with comments like *"Respect, Mr. Mayor! 💪👋"*, *"We're with you until the end! ❤️🤝"*, or simply strings of emojis like *"💪❤️👋👋"*. These interactions emphasized loyalty, emotional intensity, and personal admiration over policy deliberation.

Rather than inviting detailed engagement with public policy, Piedone's campaign cultivated a digital space centered on affective affirmation and symbolic belonging. This highly emotionalized communication style, although effective in mobilizing a core electorate, contributed to the personalization and polarization of online discourse.

The table provides a comparative overview of the communication strategies employed by the three main candidates—Nicușor Dan, Gabriela Firea, and Cristian Popescu-Piedone—during the final week of the 2024 local elections in Bucharest.

Table 3: Campaign Messaging Styles and the Role of Criticism in
Digital Political Communication

Candidate	Intensity	Tone	Main Target	Typical Example	Function of Criticism
Nicușor Dan	Low	Reserved, policy-focused	Institutional inefficiency and systemic issues	The real estate mafia is a result of years of complicity between politicians and speculators.	Policy contrasts and legitimacy through institutional reform
Gabriela Firea	Moderate	Confrontational but within administrative scope	Nicușor Dan's current term as mayor	The city has been left in ruin. People suffer while promises are broken.	Personal differentiation and record comparison
Cristian Popescu-Piedone	High	Aggressive, sarcastic, anti-elite	Entire political class, anonymous elites	I don't lie, I build. They sit in offices, I get things done. Clowns in suits!	Populist polarization and identity building

Negative Campaigning

The role of negative campaigning varied significantly across candidates, both in tone and in strategic intent.

Nicușor Dan maintained a relatively restrained approach to criticism, focusing primarily on institutional inefficiencies and inherited structural problems. While he occasionally referred to issues such as the "real estate mafia" or obstructed urban projects, these references were framed within a broader discourse of administrative reform rather than direct personal attacks. Notably, explicit negative rhetoric rarely originated from the candidate himself. However, user-generated content on his Facebook page frequently adopted a more confrontational tone, targeting his main opponents with sarcasm or derision. For instance, one supporter wrote: "Now I'll grab some popcorn and wait to see which of his buddies Piedone brings along", ridiculing the candidate's perceived associations. Another commenter wrote: "Next time, take Cristian Popescu Piedone with you—maybe there's no one left to wipe the board. INFRASTRUCTURE RECEPTION!!", suggesting incompetence through irony. A third post stated: "You should've taken Ciolacu along with Firea", implying a political alliance framed in ridicule. These examples suggest that, even if not directly promoted by Dan's team, the digital environment around his campaign facilitated an undercurrent of oppositional rhetoric.

Gabriela Firea, by contrast, employed a more direct and structured form of negative campaigning. Her messaging consistently emphasized the shortcomings of Bucharest's current administration—highlighting stalled infrastructure, urban degradation, and poor service delivery. Although her posts rarely named Nicușor Dan directly, she often referenced "the current mayor" or contrasted her own tenure with "the last four years," invoking a narrative of administrative regression.

In numerous posts, Firea underscored her past achievements—such as opening medical facilities or supporting families—while lamenting their current neglect. For example, she invoked the "chaos on construction sites" or claimed that "nothing is working anymore", framing the current state of the city as evidence of her successor's failure. This comparative strategy implicitly discredited her opponent while reaffirming her leadership capabilities.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone adopted the most openly confrontational and populist tone among the three candidates. His posts often blended personal pride with sarcasm, appeals to the "common people," and a clear rejection of the political establishment. Through recurring slogans like "I don't lie, I build" and "They sit in offices, I work in the streets", he projected an image of moral superiority and practical competence, contrasting himself with what he portrayed as a passive or corrupt elite.

Although many comments on his page were admiring and enthusiastic, some also echoed this combative style. A user criticized the broader political class by stating: "They've all been saying the same for more than 30 years 😉💥👍👏", expressing frustration with empty political rhetoric. Another user commented: "Just big promises and small achievements", reinforcing a key populist narrative of political failure. Even

those supportive of Piedone tended to frame their admiration in contrast with general political inefficacy: "If only someone did in my town what you're doing… it's a shame that there are so many resources and no one to manage them".

Such comments, amplified by Piedone's own style, contributed to a discourse shaped by personal loyalty, populist contrast, and implicit delegitimization of traditional political actors. Nearly every message reinforced a moral dichotomy between a capable, action-oriented "us" and an inefficient, disconnected "them." This rhetorical strategy fueled both emotional engagement and a strongly polarized atmosphere in his campaign.

In sum, the intensity and nature of negative campaigning differed not only by candidate, but also by the degree of control over their digital communities. While some attacks were strategic and candidate-driven, others emerged organically from emotionally invested supporters, shaping the broader campaign narrative in often unpredictable ways.

The table below synthesizes the differences in tone, target, and rhetorical function of negative campaigning across the three candidates. While Nicuşor Dan maintained a technocratic and restrained style, Gabriela Firea emphasized comparative blame, and Cristian Popescu-Piedone adopted a populist, polarizing narrative centered on moral contrast and confrontation.

Table 4: The Rhetoric of Opposition: Negative Campaigning in the 2024 Bucharest Elections

Candidate	Negative Tone	Target of Criticism	Typical Expression	Source of Negativity	Polarization Level
Nicuşor Dan	Subtle and policy-based	Institutional inefficiency, past mismanagement	The real estate mafia is the result of collusion between politicians and speculators.	Supporter comments with ironic tone and mockery	Low to moderate
Gabriela Firea	Direct and comparative	Current administration (implicitly Nicuşor Dan)	Nothing works in Bucharest anymore!	Candidate's posts contrasting her own mandate	Moderate
Cristian Popescu-Piedone	Confrontational and sarcastic	Political class and opponents (implicitly and explicitly)	I don't lie, I build. They sit in offices, I work in the streets.	Both candidate and supporters through slogans and moral rejection	High

Use of Populist Rhetoric

The degree of populist rhetoric represented another key point of differentiation among the candidates.

Nicușor Dan employed very limited populist framing. While he addressed issues such as inefficiency or corruption, his discourse remained grounded in institutional reform, urban governance, and transparency. His campaign avoided simplistic binaries like "the people" versus "the elite," favoring a technocratic tone that emphasized data, planning, and administrative competence.

Gabriela Firea, meanwhile, made occasional use of populist elements, particularly in her calls for civic unity and emotional engagement. Her statement "Together we can make Bucharest the city people dream of" exemplifies a collaborative and inclusive tone—positioning herself as an ally of ordinary citizens. Still, she generally refrained from direct attacks on elites or explicit moral dichotomies, keeping her populist rhetoric relatively moderate.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone stood out as the candidate who most consistently employed populist themes. His rhetoric portrayed him as a man of the people—authentic, self-made, and in stark opposition to a disconnected and corrupt political class. He frequently referred to "good people" and described himself as someone who "works in the streets" while others "sit in offices", reinforcing a strong "us vs. them" dynamic.

This populist positioning was echoed and amplified by his followers. In one comment, a supporter lamented political inaction, expressing deep skepticism toward traditional political actors. Another user criticized Romania's intellectual elite in dramatic terms: "These stupid politicians have done nothing… the intellectual class has always generated corruption, manipulation, and diversion.". Elsewhere, the community expressed collective support using emotionally resonant phrases like "God help us, good people", anchoring the campaign in shared moral identity and spiritual symbolism.

In sum, while all candidates sought connection with voters, only Piedone framed that connection within a sustained populist narrative—centered on personal authenticity, anti-elitism, and a binary moral world.

The table below synthesizes the use of populist rhetoric in the Facebook communication strategies of the three candidates. It highlights the intensity, narrative framing, language choices, and audience responses that differentiate their approaches.

Table 5: Populist Framing and Voter Resonance in Candidate Facebook Discourse

Candidate	Populist Intensity	Core Narrative	Typical Expression	Audience Echo	Example from Comments
Nicuşor Dan	Low	Technocratic competence, institutional reform	We allocated 15 million lei for thermal system modernization.	Rational comments focused on governance outcomes	—
Gabriela Firea	Moderate	Unity and collective action against dysfunction	Together we can make Bucharest the city people dream of.	Supportive reactions framed as collective belonging	"Congratulations on all your projects! 😍 "
Cristian Popescu-Piedone	High	Moral struggle of the 'good people' against corrupt elites	I don't lie, I build. They sit in offices, I work in the streets.	Emotive support, anti-elite slogans, and spiritual appeals	"They've all been saying the same thing for over 30 years 😉 💥👍👏" / "God help us, good people"

Fact-Based vs. Emotional Appeals

One of the most striking differences among the candidates was the degree to which their communication relied on factual reasoning versus emotional engagement.

Nicuşor Dan maintained a predominantly fact-based, technocratic tone. His posts often referenced investment figures, infrastructure projects, or policy tools aimed at increasing transparency and efficiency. For instance, one supporter commented: "Wonderful! 😍 I first heard the term 'participatory budgeting' from the mayor of Timişoara, Dominic Fritz! This is what respect for citizens looks like! Congratulations, from the bottom of my heart! Bucharest is getting better! 🙏💪👏." This type of discourse suggests an alignment between Dan's own messaging and his audience's interest in governance mechanisms and civic participation.

Gabriela Firea, in contrast, drew heavily on emotional language to build solidarity and reinforce her image as a caring and responsive leader. Her posts were frequently accompanied by expressions of gratitude and symbolic gestures. A typical reaction from her audience reads: "🙏🙏🙏❤️." These emotional affirmations, though brief, illustrate how Firea's audience connected with her campaign more through affect than argument, reinforcing her focus on relational politics rather than technical detail.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone employed the most emotionally charged language of all three. His campaign evoked loyalty, resilience, and a sense of belonging. For example, one fervent supporter declared: *"PIEDONE, GENERAL MAYOR OF THE CAPITAL 🙏❤️🍀👍."* This emotionally saturated post, adorned with emojis

of faith, luck, love, and national pride, reflects how Piedone's persona transcended policy and resonated as a symbol of hope and personal trust for his followers.

Together, these patterns highlight how each candidate constructed their persuasive ethos: through rational appeal (Dan), emotional resonance (Firea), or intense charismatic loyalty (Piedone). The table below summarizes how each candidate blended rational and emotional appeals in their Facebook communication. It outlines their communication focus, typical expression styles, emotional intensity, and the nature of audience engagement.

Table 6: Fact-Based Reasoning vs. Emotional Engagement: A Comparative Overview

Candidate	Communication Focus	Example Expression	Emotional Intensity	Engagement Type
Nicușor Dan	Data-driven, institutional, technocratic	Wonderful! 😍 [...] participatory budgeting [...] Congratulations, from the bottom of my heart! 🙏💪👋	Low	Policy-oriented approval and civic discourse
Gabriela Firea	Emotional bonding, gratitude, unity	🙏🙏🙏❤️	Moderate to High	Affective support, symbolic affirmation
Cristian Popescu-Piedone	Intense emotional loyalty, personal struggle	PIEDONE, GENERAL MAYOR OF THE CAPITAL🙏❤️🍀👍	High	Charismatic celebration, national pride

Level of Engagement

The intensity and nature of audience engagement varied significantly across the three candidates, mirroring the rhetorical tone and stylistic choices of their campaigns.

Nicușor Dan maintained a consistent yet moderate level of interaction. His fact-based and institutional communication attracted comments from citizens who valued structured, pragmatic dialogue. Supporters often responded with informed appreciation or thoughtful questions; such responses illustrate how rational discourse can still generate emotionally positive—but content-rich—engagement.

Gabriela Firea drew higher engagement rates, fueled by her emotionally oriented content and relatable tone. Many of her posts received symbolic gestures of support and expressions of encouragement, often brief but affectively loaded. These emotive responses, often accompanied by emojis, reflect her ability to foster closeness and affinity among followers, even in the absence of detailed policy dialogue.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone inspired the highest levels of engagement, often marked by enthusiastic repetition, symbolic affirmation, and charismatic praise. His supporters expressed loyalty with vibrant, personal declarations, emotionally rich messages, filled with capital letters, exclamation points, and affectionate language,

exemplifying the intense, almost celebratory nature of Piedone's digital community.

In summary, the level of engagement was shaped not only by the content of the messages, but also by the emotional register and relational dynamics that each candidate cultivated with their audience—whether through policy discussion, personal empathy, or charismatic identification.

The table below compares the levels and styles of audience engagement across the three candidates. It highlights the volume, tone, and emotional resonance of voter responses in reaction to each candidate's communication strategy.

Table 7: Comparative Levels and Emotional Dynamics of Audience Engagement on Facebook

Candidate	Engagement Volume	Style of Interaction	Example Comment	Emotional Intensity
Nicuşor Dan	Moderate	Informative, policy-oriented comments	Wonderful! [...] participatory budgeting [...] Congratulations, from the bottom of my heart! 🙏💪👏	Low to Moderate
Gabriela Firea	High	Affective reactions, encouragement, emojis	Good luck! 🙏❤️👍💖💖🙏	Moderate to High
Cristian Popescu-Piedone	Very High	Charismatic praise, intense loyalty, celebration	Congratulations and best of luck! YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A WONDERFUL EVENING [...]❤️🙏🤗	Very High

Diversity of Interactions

A key indicator of democratic deliberation in online spaces is the presence of diverse interactions—comments that reflect not just affirmation but also questioning, critique, or dialogue across perspectives.

Nicuşor Dan's Facebook posts demonstrated the highest level of conversational diversity. While many followers expressed support, others engaged in critical reflection or policy-based suggestions. For instance, one user wrote: *"Bravo! The project must be extended to ALL the streets and boulevards of the capital, which suffer from a lack of trees [...] If you take these aspects into account and act accordingly, the trees will survive; if not, they won't, and public money will be wasted again."* This comment combines endorsement with constructive criticism, reflecting both concern for policy outcomes and a willingness to hold the candidate accountable.

Gabriela Firea's comment sections, by contrast, were more ideologically aligned. The dominant tone was supportive and affirming, with few visible counterpoints. One typical comment reads: *"Good luck, Mrs. Gabriela Firea! The one currently sitting in the mayor's chair lives in a universe disconnected from reality. Surely the people of Bucharest will vote for you.* 🙏🙏🙏*"*. Here the emphasis is on reinforcing Firea's legitimacy while discrediting the opponent, with little room for

nuanced debate or critique.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone's comments reflected the lowest diversity. His posts generated a flood of enthusiastic and loyal affirmations, with virtually no dissent. Such declarations, emotionally saturated and often accompanied by nationalistic and spiritual emojis, suggest a strong echo chamber, where followers repeat campaign slogans and reinforce each other's views, rather than engaging in deliberation.

In short, while all three candidates mobilized supportive communities, Nicușor Dan's digital space stood out as the most deliberative, Firea's as emotionally unified, and Piedone's as intensely loyal but ideologically closed. The table below illustrates the variation in interaction quality across the three candidates' comment sections. It highlights the presence or absence of debate, counterarguments, and echo chamber effects.

Table 8: Deliberative Potential of Facebook Discussions: A Comparative Overview

Candidate	Interaction Type	Example Comment	Deliberative Quality
Nicușor Dan	Diverse, with critical and constructive comments	Bravo! The project must be extended [...] If you take these aspects into account and act accordingly, the trees will survive; if not, they won't [...]	High
Gabriela Firea	Partisan support with limited counterarguments	Good luck, Mrs. Gabriela Firea! [...] Surely the people of Bucharest will vote for you.	Moderate
Cristian Popescu-Piedone	Echo chamber with uniform, loyal affirmations	PIEDONE, GENERAL MAYOR OF THE CAPITAL 🙏❤️🍀👍	Low

Incivility and Polarization

An important final indicator in evaluating the democratic quality of online political discourse is the presence of incivility and ideological polarization.

Nicușor Dan's comment space, by contrast, was the most civil. Users responded with appreciation, thoughtful critique, and policy-oriented suggestions, without resorting to personal attacks. A representative example is: *"Wonderful!* 😍 *[...] participatory budgeting [...] Congratulations, from the bottom of my heart!* 🙏 💪👏 *"*. This reflects a more respectful tone, focused on institutional innovation and civic engagement.

Gabriela Firea's comments also contained instances of incivility, though less frequent. Occasionally, supporters resorted to inflammatory language, particularly when referring to her adversaries. One such comment reads: *"LIARS, you bunch of LIARS led by GABRIELA FIREA! BOOOO, SHAME of the Romanian nation!"*. Although emotionally expressive, such discourse detracts from constructive debate and contributes to a climate of antagonism.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone's posts attracted the highest concentration of hostile and toxic comments. Users frequently expressed contempt toward political opponents using aggressive language and exclusionary metaphors. For example, one supporter wrote*: "There's nothing left but for you to win the elections, Mr. Mayor, by a crushing score — I'm 100% sure it will happen! [...] You need to clean up this mess, in plain Romanian: throw the trash in the dumpster, where it belongs."* This metaphorical framing of political opponents as "trash" exemplifies the hostile tone and polarizing narrative often present in Piedone's comment section.

Taken together, these examples highlight how Facebook functioned not only as a platform for political mobilization but also as a space where ideological rigidity and incivility could flourish—particularly within the digital communities of Piedone and, to a lesser extent, Firea.

The table below summarizes the tone and level of polarization observed in user comments on the candidates' Facebook pages. It includes examples that illustrate the varying degrees of hostility, incivility, and ideological rigidity across the campaigns.

Table 9: Incivility and Ideological Polarization in Facebook Comment Sections

Candidate	Tone of Comments	Example Comment	Polarization Level
Nicușor Dan	Respectful, civic, focused on policy	Wonderful! [...] participatory budgeting [...] Congratulations, from the bottom of my heart!	Low
Gabriela Firea	Occasional hostility, emotionally charged critique	LIARS [...] SHAME of the Romanian nation!	Moderate
Cristian Popescu-Piedone	High incivility, polarizing and aggressive tone	[...] throw the trash in the dumpster, where it belongs	High

Voter Engagement and the Nature of Online Discourse

The distribution of comment types across the Facebook pages of the three candidates—Nicușor Dan, Gabriela Firea, and Cristian Popescu-Piedone—reveals significant variation in voter engagement and the deliberative potential of each digital community.

Nicușor Dan's page displayed the highest proportion of constructive comments (13%) and the lowest percentage of incivility (3%), suggesting a comparatively healthier online environment for civic dialogue. While partisan comments were present (7%), they were significantly outnumbered by neutral or affective messages (77%), which often conveyed appreciation or symbolic support without aggressive polarization. The diversity of interactions on his page was high, and the overall deliberative quality of the discussion can be classified as moderate—an indicator of the technocratic and policy-driven tone of his campaign.

In contrast, Gabriela Firea's community was marked by a stronger presence of partisan reinforcement (28%) and a notable level of incivility (10%). Constructive contributions were limited (6%), and most comments (56%) were affective in nature, reflecting emotional engagement more than critical evaluation. Comment diversity was moderate, and the deliberative quality remained relatively low. This pattern aligns with her campaign strategy, which blended governance references with emotionally charged appeals and community-oriented symbolism.

Cristian Popescu-Piedone's digital space was the most polarized and emotionally saturated. While constructive input was minimal (3%), his page hosted a high volume of partisan (44%) and uncivil (22%) comments. These interactions often took the form of slogans, declarations of loyalty, or disparagement of political opponents. Neutral or affective comments constituted only 31%, indicating a dominant tone of ideological rigidity. Accordingly, the level of comment diversity was low, and the deliberative quality of the discussion was very low. This pattern confirms the populist and confrontational tone of his communication style, which invited emotional affirmation and moral dichotomies rather than reflective dialogue.

Together, these findings illustrate how different campaign strategies shaped not only the content of political messaging but also the quality of public discourse around it. While all candidates mobilized active supporter communities, only Nicușor Dan's platform fostered a relatively deliberative environment, whereas Firea's and especially Piedone's campaigns encouraged emotional alignment and partisan consolidation.

Implications for Democratic Deliberation

The findings suggest that, in the context of the 2024 Bucharest local elections, Facebook functioned more as a platform for political mobilization than as a space for deliberative democracy. The prevalence of negative campaigning, populist rhetoric, and emotionally charged content indicates that social media may reinforce ideological divides rather than fostering rational discourse and democratic deliberation. This trend aligns with global observations where social media platforms, while enhancing accessibility, also contribute to the fragmentation of public discourse and the amplification of extreme viewpoints.

This process, which we propose to call *deliberative disintegration*, describes the gradual erosion of democratic dialogue in favor of emotionally charged, adversarial, and populist exchanges. Rather than encouraging informed discussion across perspectives, online platforms tend to promote homogeneity within ideological groups and antagonism across them, thereby diminishing the potential for mutual understanding and civic reasoning. In this context, although Facebook amplifies visibility and facilitates interaction, it often undermines the deliberative function that is essential to the health of democratic processes.

Deliberative disintegration thus captures the paradox of digital political engagement: while more people than ever participate in public discourse, the quality of that participation is increasingly shaped by affective polarization and

rhetorical simplification. The concept invites future research into how technological infrastructures and platform logics might be restructured to better serve democratic deliberation rather than erode it.

Final Insights: Campaign Voices and Voter Echoes Online

This study set out to examine whether Facebook functioned as a space for democratic deliberation during the 2024 local elections in Bucharest, focusing on both the communication strategies of the three main candidates—Nicuşor Dan, Gabriela Firea, and Cristian Popescu-Piedone—and the patterns of audience engagement on their official pages.

In relation to RQ1, the findings reveal important differences in campaign discourse. Nicuşor Dan adopted a technocratic and fact-based communication style that emphasized institutional responsibility, transparency, and urban governance. His posts included detailed references to budgets, project timelines, and infrastructure investments, reflecting a high alignment with the norms of deliberative democracy. Gabriela Firea, by contrast, blended appeals to past achievements with emotionally charged language aimed at fostering unity and trust. Her communication focused more on symbolic connection than on policy elaboration. Cristian Popescu-Piedone advanced a distinctly populist narrative, framing governance as a personal mission rooted in moral superiority and antagonism toward political elites. His campaign largely eschewed institutional language, favoring direct slogans, emotive self-positioning, and strong personalization.

In response to RQ2, the nature of audience interaction mirrored the candidates' rhetorical styles. Dan's followers engaged in moderately frequent, largely civil, and occasionally critical discussions, often focused on policy substance. Firea's supporters responded with emotionally affirming messages but showed less openness to debate or dissent. Piedone's digital community exhibited the highest levels of enthusiasm but also the most intense polarization, with frequent instances of incivility and ideologically rigid support. These patterns indicate that while Facebook enabled visibility and participation, it more often amplified affective resonance and group identity than it fostered meaningful deliberation.

Importantly, these findings should be interpreted considering the electoral outcome: Nicuşor Dan's victory suggests that fact-based and institutionally grounded communication may still resonate with a substantial portion of the urban electorate. However, it also underscores the fragmented nature of the public sphere, in which emotional and populist narratives can attract intense support without necessarily fostering democratic discourse.

In sum, although traces of deliberative engagement were present—especially in Dan's campaign—social media remained predominantly a space for partisan affirmation, emotional alignment, and rhetorical polarization, particularly within the digital communities surrounding Firea and Piedone.

Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into the dynamics of political communication and voter engagement on Facebook during the 2024 Bucharest local elections, it is subject to several limitations. The analysis focuses exclusively on public posts and comments from candidates' official pages, thereby excluding private messages, group interactions, or paid promotional content that may have influenced public perception. Additionally, the study is geographically and temporally bounded, limiting the generalizability of the findings beyond the urban Romanian context and the final week of the campaign. Future research could expand the scope by incorporating cross-platform comparisons, longitudinal data, or interviews with users to better understand the motivations and perceptions behind online political behavior.

Future Research and Considerations

Future research should investigate how platform design, moderation policies, and algorithmic incentives contribute to the dynamics of deliberative disintegration. Understanding the role of technological architecture in shaping affective engagement and rhetorical framing is essential for developing interventions that could mitigate ideological rigidity and enhance deliberative quality. Moreover, cross-national comparative studies could offer insight into how different electoral systems, media environments, and civic cultures interact with social media to either reinforce or resist the disintegration of deliberation. Such studies would help identify the conditions under which digital platforms might support democratic discourse rather than corrode it.

Although Nicușor Dan's policy-centric strategy generated only moderate levels of engagement online, it is significant that he won re-election with approximately 48% of the vote. This suggests that while online popularity often amplifies visibility, it does not automatically translate into electoral success. Offline factors—such as governance records, public trust, and traditional media coverage—remain crucial in shaping voter preferences.

These findings open important avenues for further research on the disconnect between digital visibility and democratic legitimacy. In particular, scholars should explore how emotional intensity and algorithmic amplification affect voter perceptions, and how platforms might be redesigned to support deliberative resilience in future campaigns

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Društvene mreže i deliberativna dezintegracija političke komunikacije: Dinamika odnosa građana i kandidata na Fejsbuku tokom izbornih kampanja

Adriana Ștefănel, vanredni profesor, Fakultet za novinarstvo i masovne komunikacije, Univerzitet u Bukureštu. Rumunija

Apstrakt

Ova studija istražuje dinamiku komunikacije između građana i kandidata na Fejsbuku tokom lokalnih izbora 2024. godine u Bukureštu, sa fokusom na to kako digitalne platforme oblikuju politički diskurs i građanski angažman. Korišćenjem analize sadržaja, razmatraju se strategije kampanje troje glavnih kandidata—Nicușor Dan, Gabriela Firea i Cristian Popescu-Piedone—s posebnim osvrtom na obrasce uokvirivanja politika, negativne kampanje, populističke retorike i odnos između emocionalnih i činjeničnih poruka. Paralelno se analizira i interakcija birača, procenjujući intenzitet angažovanja, raznolikost diskursa, neuljudnost i ideološku polarizaciju. Nalazi pokazuju da Fejsbuk, umesto da podstakne inkluzivnu deliberaciju, deluje kao katalizator deliberativne dezintegracije, pojačavajući fragmentaciju, učvršćujući eho komore i podrivajući demokratsku otpornost. Rezultati postavljaju važna pitanja o ulozi platforme u oblikovanju javnog diskursa i kvalitetu izborne komunikacije u algoritamski kuriranim okruženjima.

Ključne reči: afektivna polarizacija, deliberativna dezintegracija, nepristojnost na internetu, politička komunikacija na Fejsbuku, populistička retorika.

Gerovital: A Case Study of Revitalizing an Iconic Romanian Brand through Media Representation of Cultural Heritage

Mara Georgia Lixandru[12], Assistant Professor, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

The following study examines the revitalization of Gerovital, an iconic Romanian brand, through strategic media representation of cultural heritage. Gerovital, renowned for its anti-aging skincare products, carries a legacy of scientific innovation initiated by Ana Aslan (1897–1988). This research investigates how the brand has reinterpreted its historical significance, positioning itself as a symbol of Romanian ingenuity and resilience, a concept explored by Torelli et al. (2010) in their study on cultural brand meanings.

To analyze Gerovital's brand revitalization, this study employs a mixed-methods approach. A quantitative content analysis, based on the framework of Gibson and Ward (2000) and adapted by Filipescu (2020), evaluates the structure and messaging strategies of the Gerovital-Farmec website and its official social media pages. By measuring the frequency of heritage-related themes and user interactions, the study assesses how digital communication reinforces brand identity and engagement. In parallel, a qualitative audiovisual analysis of YouTube content follows the methodology outlined by Kozinets (2010) for studying digital narratives, exploring how Gerovital integrates historical storytelling with modern marketing strategies to maintain relevance.

Findings reveal that Gerovital successfully leverages nostalgia, national pride, and authenticity to foster emotional connections with consumers, a phenomenon well-documented by Hartmann and Brunk (2019) in their work on nostalgia marketing. Digital storytelling, visual imagery, and social media engagement serve as key pillars in revitalizing its identity while appealing to both domestic and international audiences. As Wilson (2018) emphasizes, the power of storytelling in brand management plays a crucial role in sustaining consumer interest and loyalty.

By balancing heritage with contemporary branding tactics, Gerovital exemplifies how legacy brands can thrive in evolving markets. This case study highlights the role of media representation in shaping consumer perceptions of heritage brands, offering insights into effective revitalization strategies. It underscores the importance of integrating historical narratives with digital engagement to sustain brand longevity in a competitive landscape.

Keywords: brand revitalization, cultural heritage, media representation, online communication, Romanian brands

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[1] Corresponding author: mara.lixandru@fjsc.ro

[2] Web of Science ResearcherID: NDS-9628-2025.

The Significance of Heritage Brands in Modern Marketing

Introduction

Heritage brands play a crucial role in contemporary marketing, as they combine tradition, authenticity, and emotional connection to foster consumer loyalty. According to Urde, Greyser, and Balmer (2007), these brands rely on their historical legacy to establish a strong identity, differentiating themselves from competitors. This legacy, often built over decades or centuries, allows them to maintain consumer trust and credibility in an era where authenticity is highly valued (Aaker, 2004). However, as consumer preferences shift and digital marketing becomes increasingly dominant, heritage brands must carefully navigate the balance between preserving their historical identity and adapting to modern market expectations (Hudson, 2011).

In response to these challenges, brands strategically highlight their heritage through storytelling, visual representation, and digital engagement. Balmer (2011) emphasizes that heritage branding thrives on narratives that reinforce a brand's historical significance, craftsmanship, and long-standing values. By doing so, companies create a sense of stability in contrast to rapidly changing market trends. Kapferer (2008) further notes that heritage brands are frequently associated with superior quality and reliability, which enhances their appeal across generations. However, maintaining relevance requires more than just nostalgia-driven marketing; it necessitates innovation and digital adaptation. As Ryan (2020) argues, the integration of social media, influencer collaborations, and immersive brand experiences has become essential for sustaining heritage brands in the digital age.

This study explores how Gerovital, an iconic Romanian brand specializing in anti-aging skincare products, successfully revitalized its identity by leveraging its rich cultural heritage and digital marketing strategies. Founded by Ana Aslan in 1952, Gerovital gained international recognition for its pioneering research in gerontology (Dobrescu, 2017). As a post-communist brand, Gerovital faced significant challenges in repositioning itself in a globalized market while maintaining its legacy. By employing storytelling, nostalgia-driven marketing, and national heritage narratives, the brand strategically connected with both domestic and international audiences (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019).

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative content analysis of the Gerovital-Farmec website and social media platforms with qualitative audiovisual analysis of YouTube content. This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how digital branding techniques contribute to heritage brand revitalization (Kozinets, 2010; Filipescu, 2020). By examining Gerovital's marketing strategies, this study aims to provide insights into how heritage brands can maintain their authenticity while adapting to contemporary consumer expectations. The findings contribute to broader discussions on cultural heritage branding, media representation, and the evolving role of storytelling in brand management (Wilson, 2018).

Ultimately, this case study highlights the importance of integrating historical narratives with modern digital engagement strategies. As consumers increasingly

seek authenticity and emotional connections with brands (Swann et al., 2012), the ability to merge tradition with innovation is critical for long-term brand sustainability. Gerovital serves as a compelling example of how heritage brands can navigate the complexities of modern marketing while staying true to their legacy.

Tradition and Emotional Connection in Brand Revitalization

Brand revitalization is a critical process for heritage brands, requiring a balance between preserving tradition and adapting to contemporary market demands. A strong emotional connection with consumers plays a pivotal role in this transformation, as nostalgia, cultural pride, and brand authenticity foster consumer engagement and loyalty (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019). According to Urde et al. (2007), heritage brands leverage their historical narratives to create meaningful relationships with consumers, drawing on collective memory and national identity. For instance, Eldesouky (2020) highlights that a brand's resurgence demonstrates how it can intertwine historical authenticity with modern marketing strategies, ensuring relevance without compromising legacy.

Brand revitalization – a method used by businesses and brand managers to avoid a brand's deterioration or aging – acquired appeal in post-communist countries by offering a rapid repair for "transitional" brands' identity crisis (Hallegatte, 2014). Almost every surviving post-communist brand in Central and Eastern Europe has participated in multiple branding initiatives of varying scope and sophistication since 1989. These initiatives have ranged from repositioning strategies to complete rebranding efforts, all aimed at aligning with new consumer expectations and international standards. However, revitalizing a brand primarily involves developing unique products that cater to the tastes of today's customers, rather than those of the past (Hallegatte, 2014).

A fundamental aspect of this revitalization process is the strategic use of storytelling, which enables brands to communicate their rich heritage while fostering consumer trust (Wilson, 2018). As noted by Kapferer (2008), through visual and textual narratives, heritage brands emphasize their origins, craftsmanship, and historical milestones, positioning themselves as symbols of resilience and enduring quality. Gerovital's association with Ana Aslan's pioneering research in anti-aging cosmetics serves as a compelling storytelling device, reinforcing its credibility and deepening emotional ties with consumers (Torelli et al., 2010).

Moreover, digital marketing has become an essential tool in brand revitalization, allowing heritage brands to engage with both older and newer audiences effectively (Hudson, 2011). Aaker (2004) argues that social media campaigns, influencer partnerships, and immersive brand experiences help bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, making historical brands relevant in contemporary cultural contexts. By aligning with values such as self-care, scientific innovation, and national pride (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019), Gerovital successfully revitalized its image while preserving its core identity.

As Dion and Mazzalovo (2016) assert, successful brand revitalization is not solely about reviving historical narratives but also about reinterpreting them to fit the evolving cultural and economic landscape. Companies must adapt to contemporary trends while ensuring their brand's authenticity remains intact. This is particularly evident in post-communist regions, where consumers' expectations have shifted toward globalized aesthetics, digital engagement, and sustainability concerns (Hallegatte, 2014).

Ultimately, as Balmer (2011) suggests, the case of brands such as Gerovital underscores the significance of emotional connection in brand revitalization. Consumers increasingly seek authenticity and heritage in their purchasing choices, and brands that effectively harness their legacy while adapting to evolving expectations stand to gain a lasting competitive advantage.

Purpose of the Study: Heritage, Innovation, and Digital Revival

Founded in 1952 by Prof. Ana Aslan M.D., a pioneer in anti-aging treatments, Gerovital quickly became a symbol of Romanian innovation and medical advancement (Dobrescu, 2017). Dr. Aslan's groundbreaking research in gerontology led to the development of Gerovital H3, a product that gained international recognition and was used by renowned figures such as John F. Kennedy, Marlene Dietrich and Salvador Dalí (Dobrescu, 2017). This historical significance provided the foundation for Gerovital's brand identity, reinforcing its position as an emblem of Romanian scientific ingenuity.

This research explores how Gerovital, as a long-established Romanian brand, revitalized its identity through strategic online and media representations. Brand revitalization relies heavily on the ability to adapt traditional values to modern consumer expectations (Dion & Mazzalovo, 2016). Gerovital has successfully achieved this by incorporating digital marketing strategies, using social media engagement, and implementing brand storytelling techniques (Wilson, 2018).

One of the core components of Gerovital's revitalization has been its ability to align with narratives of national pride and cultural heritage. Through advertisements, social media campaigns, and influencer collaborations, the brand has reinforced its historical roots while appealing to contemporary consumer sensibilities (Kapferer, 2008). Nostalgia-driven marketing, particularly in post-communist contexts, plays a crucial role in consumer engagement (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019). The ability to foster an emotional connection through cultural identity allows brands like Gerovital to remain relevant despite market fluctuations (Urde et al., 2007).

In addition to traditional storytelling, visual imagery has been instrumental in Gerovital's modern rebranding efforts. By incorporating elements of Romanian history, aesthetics, and medical advancements, the brand has managed to differentiate itself in an increasingly competitive global market (Hallegatte, 2014). Digital platforms have further enabled the company to reach international audiences, promoting its products while maintaining its heritage identity (Aaker, 2004).

Research Framework

This research examines Gerovital's positioning as a symbol of Romanian ingenuity and resilience (Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2010) by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. A quantitative content analysis is conducted to analyze the construction of the Gerovital-Farmec website, as well as its official Facebook and YouTube pages. The analysis covers the period from January 1, 2023, to April 1, 2024, allowing for an evaluation of how the brand has recently communicated its heritage and innovation. This approach enables the identification of recurring themes, messaging strategies, and visual elements that reinforce the brand's historical identity and digital engagement. Similar methodologies have been utilized in studies analyzing brand posts on social media platforms to assess user engagement and content effectiveness (Zoha, Bhutto, Syed, & Soomro, 2016).

Scoring for evaluating the informative and interactive nature of the website is based on the framework proposed by Gibson and Ward (2000), adapted from Filipescu (2020). This scoring system provides a structured assessment of how effectively the website communicates brand-related content, historical narratives, and product details. Additionally, the study evaluates the social media activity of revitalized brands using an adapted scoring model from Filipescu (2020), allowing for a comparative analysis of Gerovital-Farmec's digital engagement strategies.

A qualitative 'scanning model' is applied to assess the brand's audiovisual content on its official YouTube channel, Farmec Romania. The analysis focuses on videos uploaded between January 1, 2023, and April 1, 2024, examining how Gerovital communicates its identity, values, and engagement strategies. The scanning model allows for an in-depth exploration of narrative structures, aesthetic choices, and audience interaction, offering insights into how the brand adapts to contemporary digital marketing trends while maintaining its historical essence. This approach aligns with methodologies proposed for performing qualitative content analysis of video data in social media research (Kozinets, 2010).

The study further includes:

- Analysis of the informative dimension of the Gerovital-Farmec website, examining the depth and accuracy of brand-related content, historical narratives, and product details available on the platform.
- Assessment of the interactive dimension of the website, exploring the level of consumer engagement, interactive features, and digital communication strategies implemented.
- Evaluation of social media activity on Facebook and YouTube, focusing on user interactions, engagement metrics, and the strategic dissemination of brand messaging across different platforms within the selected timeframe.

From the structure of the website and social media pages emerges a new approach that restores Gerovital-Farmec's credibility, attracts new consumer segments, revalues its brand heritage, and rearticulates its identity. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this study provides a comprehensive

understanding of how Gerovital leverages its legacy while evolving in the modern marketplace. The findings contribute to broader discussions on heritage brand positioning, digital branding strategies, and the role of national identity in consumer perceptions.

Storytelling and Emotional Attachment

Gerovital's marketing campaigns have adeptly harnessed themes of nostalgia and authenticity to strengthen emotional connections with consumers. By aligning with Romania's rich cultural heritage, the brand forges profound emotional bonds, resonating deeply with its audience (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019).

An analysis of comments on the Gerovital-Farmec website and its official Facebook page reveals two primary antecedents of emotional attachment: emotional memory and the perceived benefits of use. Emotional memory refers to the sentimental recollections that consumers associate with a brand, often rooted in personal or collective past experiences. These memories can significantly influence brand attachment, as they evoke feelings of affection and connection. For instance, Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) identify emotional memories as a key antecedent of emotional attachment to brands, highlighting how past experiences and sentimental associations can foster deep consumer-brand bonds.

The perceived benefits of use pertain to the tangible and intangible advantages consumers believe they gain from a product. When users recognize consistent quality and efficacy in a brand's offerings, it enhances their emotional attachment. This perception is crucial, as it reinforces the brand's reliability and value proposition, leading to sustained consumer loyalty.

Additionally, a sense of product patriotism is evident in user-generated content, with comments such as, "Gerovital is the brand of my youth", "The cream of beautiful Romanian women", and "I have been and remain an admirer of the products conceived by our great Lady Ana Aslan". Product patriotism involves consumers expressing national pride through their preference for domestically produced goods, thereby reinforcing their national identity. Research by Kipnis et al. (2013) delves into how consumption practices contribute to the construction and maintenance of national identity, suggesting that consumers often choose products emblematic of their nation's heritage to affirm their cultural belonging.

Moreover, the concept of identity fusion offers insight into this phenomenon. Swann et al. (2012) propose that individuals with a strong sense of identity fusion with their country are more inclined toward patriotic consumption behaviors. This means that consumers who feel a deep alignment between their personal and national identities are more likely to support brands that symbolize national pride and heritage.

The revitalization of a brand often requires a multidimensional approach that integrates cultural heritage, modern digital tools, and strategic storytelling to create a compelling narrative. In the case of Romanian branding efforts, several key elements contribute to an effective strategy: storytelling, visual imagery, and digital marketing.

Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of branding, as it helps forge emotional connections with audiences. In the context of Romanian heritage branding, narratives often focus on themes of national pride, cultural resilience, and historical continuity (Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2020). These stories can highlight Romania's folklore, historical figures, and traditional customs to establish a strong identity. For instance, integrating myths such as that of the legendary shepherd from Miorița ballad or historical figures like Vlad the Impaler can reinforce a brand's cultural authenticity and enhance engagement (Kotler & Keller, 2022). By leveraging compelling storytelling, brands can evoke a sense of belonging and nostalgia among both domestic and international audiences.

Visual branding plays a crucial role in reinforcing identity and recognition. In Romania, iconic symbols such as the *ia* (the traditional Romanian blouse), the edelweiss flower, and the Făgăraș Mountains serve as powerful visual markers of national heritage. The ia, for instance, symbolizes Romanian craftsmanship and cultural continuity, having been recognized by UNESCO as part of the country's intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2021). Similarly, the Făgăraș Mountains represent Romania's natural beauty and adventurous spirit, appealing to both local and foreign travelers. Such visual elements create a strong aesthetic appeal and enhance the emotional resonance of the brand (Schroeder, 2019).

With the advent of digital marketing, brands now have the ability to engage audiences across multiple platforms. Social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and influencer partnerships are among the key strategies used to increase brand visibility (Ryan, 2020). In the Romanian context, digital campaigns incorporating heritage-based storytelling and visuals can foster engagement among both local citizens and the Romanian diaspora. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook provide opportunities to showcase the country's traditions through curated content, live storytelling sessions, and interactive campaigns.

A comprehensive brand revitalization strategy should address both physical and virtual spaces. Modernizing physical spaces—such as redesigning stores, museums, or cultural centers—can enhance consumer experience and create a more immersive interaction with the brand (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2017). Simultaneously, improving the navigation and user experience (UX) of virtual spaces, such as websites and e-commerce platforms, ensures accessibility and engagement for a global audience. Combining these efforts with data-driven insights allows brands to align their digital presence with evolving consumer expectations.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the effectiveness of Gerovital's revitalization strategy, demonstrating its success in leveraging cultural heritage, digital marketing, and emotional branding to maintain relevance in contemporary markets. The analysis of Gerovital's digital presence—including its website, social media platforms, and

audiovisual content—reveals a well-structured and multi-layered branding approach that balances historical authenticity with modern marketing tactics.

Digital Presence and Engagement

A quantitative content analysis of the Gerovital-Farmec website demonstrates a strong emphasis on heritage-driven messaging. The brand frequently references its scientific legacy, its connection to Ana Aslan, and its long-standing presence in the global cosmetics industry. The high frequency of heritage-related keywords—such as "innovation," "tradition," "Aslan," and "anti-aging"—suggests that Gerovital strategically reinforces its historical credibility to differentiate itself from newer competitors in the cosmetics market. As Dion and Mazzalovo (2016) argue, reviving heritage brands requires rearticulating past identities in ways that resonate with present consumer expectations. Gerovital does this effectively by blending its historical significance with contemporary product innovations, thus maintaining both trust and market appeal.

The brand's social media presence also reflects a highly interactive engagement strategy. Gerovital's Facebook page (Farmec Romania) exhibits high levels of consumer interaction, with thousands of likes, comments, and shares per post. This high engagement rate suggests that consumers perceive the brand as authentic and emotionally significant (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019). A sentiment analysis of user-generated content on social media further confirms this emotional attachment, with many consumers referring to Gerovital as "the brand of my youth" or "a symbol of Romanian beauty." Such expressions indicate that Gerovital benefits from brand nostalgia, a key factor in the success of heritage brands (Urde et al., 2007).

The qualitative audiovisual analysis of Gerovital's YouTube content highlights the brand's ability to blend visual storytelling with digital communication strategies. The majority of the videos emphasize themes of scientific expertise, natural ingredients, and national heritage. This aligns with previous research on heritage branding, which suggests that visual narratives play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions of authenticity (Schroeder, 2019). Furthermore, the aesthetic choices in Gerovital's video campaigns—including the use of historical references, Romanian landscapes, and testimonials from dermatologists—reinforce the scientific legitimacy and cultural roots of the brand.

The Role of Emotional Branding and Cultural Identity

A significant aspect of Gerovital's success lies in its ability to evoke national pride and cultural heritage. The study's analysis of user comments and reviews reveals two primary antecedents of emotional attachment:

Emotional Memory – Many consumers associate Gerovital with personal or collective past experiences, particularly the legacy of Ana Aslan's pioneering work in anti-aging research. This connection fosters a deep emotional bond, reinforcing the brand's significance over time. Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) define this as emotional memory, where brands that evoke strong sentimental recollections benefit from

increased consumer loyalty and advocacy. By tapping into nostalgia and heritage, Gerovital strengthens its position as a trusted and cherished brand across generations.

Product Patriotism – The analysis of consumer discourse indicates that many users perceive Gerovital as a national treasure, emphasizing its Romanian origins as a point of pride. Research by Kipnis et al. (2013) suggests that brands that align with national identity foster deeper emotional connections with their consumers. This is particularly relevant in post-communist countries, where brands often serve as symbols of resilience and transformation (Hallegatte, 2014). Spielmann, Maguire, and Charters (2018) further emphasize that product patriotism shapes consumer identity, influenced by cultural capital, national orientation, and context.

By reinforcing these emotional and cultural associations, Gerovital positions itself not only as a cosmetic brand but as an emblem of Romanian scientific innovation. The implications of this approach extend beyond marketing; they highlight how heritage branding can serve as a tool for cultural preservation and national identity reinforcement (Wilson, 2018).

Wider Implications: Heritage Brands in a Globalized Market

Gerovital's case study underscores several broader implications for heritage branding in a globalized market. First, the brand demonstrates that heritage alone is not sufficient for long-term success—it must be continuously reinterpreted and communicated through digital strategies. As Ryan (2020) notes, successful brands merge historical narratives with contemporary digital engagement, allowing them to remain relevant across multiple consumer demographics.

Second, this study highlights the potential for heritage brands to appeal beyond national borders. Gerovital has successfully expanded its audience by leveraging digital marketing, demonstrating that nostalgia-driven branding can resonate internationally. This finding supports research by Torelli et al. (2010), which argues that cultural branding strategies can bridge local heritage with global consumer aspirations.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that social media analytics and user-generated content are valuable tools for assessing brand perception and engagement. By analyzing consumer discourse, brands can identify key emotional triggers that enhance loyalty and advocacy. This reinforces Aaker's (2004) assertion that brand equity is increasingly shaped by consumer participation in digital spaces.

Finally, Gerovital's case demonstrates that a strong digital presence can help heritage brands compete with modern industry giants. By integrating scientific credibility with cultural storytelling, the brand has successfully differentiated itself in the crowded global beauty market. This aligns with Kapferer's (2008) perspective that brands must continuously innovate while preserving their core identity.

Conclusion

The revitalization of Gerovital illustrates how heritage brands can successfully navigate contemporary markets by balancing tradition with innovation. Findings suggest that long-established brands thrive when they align with consumer expectations while preserving their historical essence (Wilson, 2018). By leveraging national pride, scientific credibility, and digital engagement strategies, Gerovital has reestablished itself as a leader in the anti-aging cosmetics sector.

A key takeaway from this study is the vital role of brand storytelling in fostering consumer loyalty and engagement. As Wilson (2018) highlights, storytelling enables brands to create meaningful narratives that reinforce their historical identity while resonating with modern audiences. Gerovital has successfully positioned itself within narratives of Romanian scientific achievement and cultural heritage, strengthening its market presence. Additionally, this study underscores the importance of digital transformation in heritage branding, as Ryan (2020) emphasizes that a strong online presence, social media engagement, and influencer collaborations are essential for maintaining relevance in today's marketplace.

Despite offering valuable insights, this study has several limitations. One major limitation is its reliance on digital representation and publicly available consumer data, which provide a broad overview of brand engagement but fail to capture the deeper psychological motivations behind consumer loyalty. Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) argue that emotional attachment to brands is often shaped by personal experiences and sentiment, which cannot be fully understood through digital interactions alone. Future research could incorporate qualitative methodologies, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to explore how nostalgia, emotional connections, and personal experiences shape consumer attitudes toward Gerovital.

Another limitation concerns the geographic and cultural scope of the study. Hakala, Lätti, and Sandberg (2011) suggest that consumer perceptions of heritage brands vary significantly across cultural contexts, as local traditions and historical associations influence brand reception. This study primarily examines Gerovital's branding strategies within Romania and its international digital presence, but further research could explore how heritage brands adapt their narratives across multiple markets. Comparative studies across different cultural and economic landscapes could provide broader insights into the global adaptation of heritage branding strategies.

Additionally, the study does not assess the long-term sustainability of Gerovital's brand revitalization efforts. Kapferer (2008) emphasizes that heritage brands must not only focus on short-term engagement but also ensure their strategies contribute to sustained brand equity. While digital marketing has proven effective in reviving Gerovital's identity, its long-term impact on consumer retention and market performance remains uncertain. Future research could analyze sales data, customer loyalty trends, and brand sentiment over time to determine whether digital engagement translates into lasting consumer commitment.

Furthermore, emerging digital marketing trends such as artificial intelligence-driven personalization, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) are not explored in this study. Ryan (2020) notes that technological advancements are reshaping consumer expectations, and heritage brands must integrate these innovations while maintaining their authenticity. Future research could examine how brands like Gerovital can leverage AI-driven marketing, interactive experiences, or sustainable product innovations while preserving their historical identity.

The findings of this study have practical implications for marketers, brand managers, and scholars interested in heritage branding. Gerovital's case demonstrates that successful brand revitalization requires a careful balance between historical authenticity and modern consumer expectations. Urde, Greyser, and Balmer (2007) argue that heritage brands must preserve their legacy while embracing innovation and digital transformation to remain competitive.

For heritage brands looking to revitalize their image, this study suggests several key strategic approaches. First, storytelling is essential, as Wilson (2018) highlights that narratives rooted in historical significance and cultural heritage strengthen consumer engagement and loyalty. Second, digital engagement is crucial, with Ryan (2020) emphasizing that social media campaigns, influencer partnerships, and interactive content enhance brand reach and relevance. Third, brands must balance nostalgia with innovation. Kapferer (2008) suggests that while heritage provides a strong foundation, brands must continuously adapt to contemporary trends to attract younger generations while retaining existing customers. Lastly, understanding cultural differences is essential, as Hakala et al. (2011) argue that global heritage brands should tailor their marketing approaches to different cultural contexts to ensure resonance with diverse audiences.

Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of heritage in contemporary brand management, providing a framework for other legacy brands seeking to modernize while maintaining authenticity. The case of Gerovital serves as a model for leveraging cultural heritage, demonstrating that a well-executed digital strategy can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, securing brand longevity in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

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Revitalizacija brenda „Gerovital" kroz medijsko predstavljanje kulturnog nasleđa

Mara Georgia Lixandru, Docent, Fakultet za novinarstvo i masovne komunikacije, Univerzitet u Bukureštu, Rumunija

Apstrakt

U našem radu se ispituje revitalizacija ikoničnog rumunskog brenda, „Gerovitala" kroz strateško medijsko promovisanje kulturnog nasleđa. Kompanija „Gerovital", poznata po svojim proizvodima za negu kože i borbu protiv starenja, nasleđuje naučne inovacije koju je pokrenula Ana Aslan (1897–1988). Naše istraživanje analizira način na koji je ovaj brend protumačio istorijski značaj, pozicionirajući se kao simbol rumunske kreativnosti i otpornosti, koncept koji su uneli Toreli i saradnici (2010) u njihovoj studiji o kulturnim značenjima brendova.

Za analizu revitalizacije brenda „Gerovital", koristili smo pristup kombinovanih metoda. Kvantitativna analiza sadržaja, zasnovana na radove Gibsona i Vorda (2000) i koju je prilagodio Filipesku (2020), procenjuje strukturu i strategije komunikacije na zvaničnom veb-sajtu „Gerovital-Farmec" i stranicama na društvenim mrežama. Merenjem učestalosti tema vezanih za kulturno nasleđe i interakcije korisnika, naš rad procenjuje metode na kojim je digitalna komunikacija ojačala identitet i angažovanost brenda. Paralelno, kvalitativna audiovizuelna analiza sadržaja na YouTube-u prati metodologiju koju je razvio Kozinets (2010) za proučavanje digitalnih narativa, istražujući kako je „Gerovital" integrisao istorijsko nasleđe sa savremenim marketinškim strategijama da bi održao svoju relevantnost.

Rezultati pokazuju da „Gerovital" uspešno koristi osećanja nostalgije, nacionalnog ponosa i autentičnosti kako bi stvorio emotivne veze sa potrošačima, fenomen koji su detaljno istražili Hartman i Brunk (2019) u njihovom radu o nostalgijskom marketingu. Transmedijalno pripovedanje, vizuelna estetika i angažovanost na društvenim mrežama predstavljaju ključne stubove u revitalizaciji brenda identiteta, omogućavajući da privlači kako domaću, tako i međunarodnu publiku. Po mišljenju Vilsona (2018), moć naracije u upravljanju brendova igra ključnu ulogu u održavanju interesovanja i lojalnosti potrošača.

Balansirajući strategije tradicije i savremenih brendova, „Gerovital" jeste pravi primer kako legendarni brendovi mogu napredovati na tržištima u razvoju. Naš rad naglašava ulogu medijske prezentacije u oblikovanju percepcije potrošača o brendovima kulturnog nasleđa, nudeći uvide u efikasne strategije revitalizacije. Takođe, ističe značaj integracije istorijskih narativa i digitalne komunikacije kako bi se osigurala dugovečnost brenda u konkurentnom poslovnom okruženju.

Poster Analysis during Student Protests in Niš: A Case Study of the Instagram Profile Filfak Blokada[1]

Neven Obradović[2][3], Assistant Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia
Ivana Mitić[4], Associate Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

This paper analyzes posters from the Instagram profile Filfak Blokada related to the student protests in Niš during 2024/2025. The goal is to identify the dominant function from the perspective of political communication and analyze the linguistic means used to convey it. The corpus includes 17 posters collected from this profile between December 27 and February 6. The findings indicate that the predominant function is informational, while a notable number of posters also combine informative and persuasive elements, especially following significant events.

Keywords: Serbian language, political communication, Instagram, functions of political communication, student protest, poster.

Poster Analysis During Student Protests in Niš: A Case Study of the Instagram Profile Filfak Blokada

Introduction

This paper examines posters from the Instagram profile *Filfak Blokada*[5] during the large-scale student protests in Serbia in 2024/2025. The primary focus is on analyzing these posters through the key functions of political communication, which, according to Slavujević (2009), include informative, educational/socializing, and persuasive functions. Additionally, the study explores the linguistic aspects, specifically the linguistic means used to convey each of these functions. By doing so, the research aims to assess how political communication functions are utilized in the context of social media while also drawing comparisons to the traditional function of political posters, as identified in previous theoretical studies.

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[2] Corresponding author: neven.obradovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

[3] ORCID: 0000-0003-2786-2703

[4] ORCID: 0000-0002-2347-6795

[5] Link: https://www.instagram.com/filfak.blokada/ (Accessed, February 6, 2025)

The topic analyzed in this paper is important from political, sociological, and linguistic perspectives. The student blockades in Niš began on December 4, 2024, with the students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš being among the first to join the blockade on December 6. The blockade was prompted by the collapse of the canopy at the Novi Sad Railway Station on November 1, 2024, at 11:52 a.m., which resulted in the deaths of 15 people and led to student protests across the Republic of Serbia. The Instagram profile analyzed in this paper was created on December 27, which we used as the starting point for extracting the poster corpus. The time frame analyzed extends to February 6, two months after the blockade at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. Our paper offers valuable insight into the functions of political communication used in creating posters, highlights events that can be considered significant historical moments, and demonstrates the use of language in political communication. Since all the posters were removed from the Instagram profile on February 16, and coverage began about the upcoming large protest on March 1, our paper is highly relevant as it emphasizes the communication strategies currently used on social media. It also shows that the fate of posters on social media is not much different from that of traditional posters – just as physical posters, as noted by Slavujević (2009), can be torn, posters on social media can be deleted. This is important because of what is referred to as postaction – with the removal of all posts, there is a chance for increased profile visits, which in the online environment boosts the profile's visibility and allows posts to reach a wider audience.

The paper is organized as follows: after a brief introduction, there is a theoretical-methodological section that examines previous research and their findings, with an emphasis on the functions of political communication and the poster. The third part is the core part of the paper, presenting the poster analysis, while the final fourth chapter provides brief concluding thoughts, followed by the references.

Theoretical and Methodological Section

The main functions of political communication

Political communication serves as the foundation for all processes necessary for the functioning of a political system. Electoral decisions, public opinion formation, and political socialization processes are all entirely dependent on political communication. When defining political communication, many authors refer to the definition by Denton and Woodward (1990). According to their perspective, political communication is "an essential discussion about the allocation of public resources (income), official authority (who is granted the power to make legislative and executive decisions), and official sanctions (what the state rewards or punishes)" (Denton & Woodward, 1990:14, cited in McNair 2003: 3; Slavujević, 2009: 22). McNair notes that while this definition includes verbal and written political rhetoric, it overlooks symbolic communication acts such as non-verbal communication, clothing, logo design, etc. For this reason, McNair broadens the concept of political

communication to encompass the entire political discourse, defining it as:

> "purposeful communication about politics that includes: a) all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors to achieve specific goals, b) communication directed toward these actors by non-politicians such as voters or newspaper columnists, c) communication about these actors and their activities contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media debate about politics" (McNair, 2003: 4).

Similar to McNair, Slavujević also highlighted several limitations in Denton and Woodward's definition of political communication, such as the lack of clarity regarding political actors and the omission of one-way and secret forms of political communication (Slavujević, 2009: 23-24). Considering this, Slavujević defines political communication as "the exchange of political messages within the scope of political activities. [...] It includes all forms of communication in the political realm, regardless of the type of government, social and political context, the forms in which content is presented, or the media used" (Slavujević, 2009: 9). In this way, Slavujević provided a timeless and all-encompassing definition of political communication in terms of both content and communication channels. The extent of this definition can be best understood by comparing it to McNair's approach. McNair's definition includes the notion of communication about political actors and their activities through news reports, editorials, and other forms of media debate on politics. However, since social networks are not considered media, but rather actors similar to media or, more precisely, intermediaries (Jakubowicz, 2009), this excludes one of the most significant channels of political communication today, which is the focus of this study.

Based on the provided definition, and noting that politics cannot be imagined "without the communication of people as political beings" (Slavujević, 2009: 27), Slavujević identifies three primary functions of political communication:

> a) the function of political information;
> b) the function of political education and socialization;
> c) the function of political persuasion (Ibid).

The function of political communication/information focused on providing information refers to "keeping the public informed about current political events, actions, and figures, as well as expressing the political interests, views, and beliefs of various political actors." Slavujević further emphasizes that its primary role is "to deliver the essential facts needed for citizens to make informed decisions between political options, while also aiding political entities in positioning themselves within a pluralistic political environment." It is also important to note that this function targets the cognitive, or knowledge-based, and rational aspects of opinions.

The function of political education and socialization is related to "teaching people various political knowledge necessary for their involvement in political life." Slavujević writes that this knowledge includes "the characteristics of the dominant ideological orientation, the features and structure of the political system, the roles of political institutions and how they function, legitimate political actors, the rules

of the 'political game,' opportunities for political action, etc." (Slavujević, 2009: 27–28). The primary role of this function is to "help an individual accept the world of political institutions, relationships, and phenomena, understand their role in it, and recognize their opportunities for action, thus forming socially acceptable aspirations and behaviors in carrying out their role" (Ibid).

The function of political persuasion is related to "the formation, reinforcement, and change of people's attitudes toward various political phenomena, events, and actors, as well as encouraging people to participate in political life according to the intentions of the persuader" (Slavujević, 2009: 29). It is important to emphasize that these three functions often overlap in the practice of political communication. Slavujević explains that political information and political education also contain elements of political persuasion. Conversely, political persuasion is impossible without educational and informational content (Ibid).

About political posters and their role in the process of political communication

The political poster is one of the most important channels of political communication (Sontag, 1970; Bonnell, 1998; Vliegenthart, 2012; Lirola, 2016; Geise, 2017). Slavujević (2009: 231) argues that the traditional definition of a poster – "a sheet of paper that is mass-distributed in public places by attaching it to a surface" – becomes "too narrow" when considering the emergence of new communication mediums. As this author notes (2009: 232), even today, the poster can be considered a 'tool of political struggle par excellence.' When considering the political poster and its role in electoral processes, according to Slavujević (2009: 232), its advantage lies in the fact that it is both "simple" and a "complex tool of mass propaganda." He (2009: 232) also points out that a poster can be used in mass actions, such as student protests, to: "inform the public about a specific event or issue and provoke a certain, primarily emotion-based, stance and behavior." Tschabrun emphasizes that political posters, much like television, combine words and images into powerful messages. However, "unlike television, the poster as a medium was not easily controlled or monopolized by any group or category of people. As a result, political posters often allowed the disenfranchised to experiment with alternative styles of political discourse" (Tschabrun, 2003: 304).

When it comes to the reaction a poster can elicit from the audience, Slavujević's (2009: 232) classification highlights the following advantages: "it doesn't require much effort to absorb the message, it captivates with its concise and well-crafted content, and its visually appealing design." The author also notes that while a poster "grabs the audience's attention through its impact, surprise, and originality" (2009: 232), it may have a limited lifespan due to wear and tear or being replaced by another poster. This differs from the posters discussed in this paper, as they, being posted on Instagram, remain available as long as the profile exists, or until the profile owner chooses to delete them.

Slavujević (2009: 232–233) outlines, in addition to 1) the basic categorization

of posters into leaflet, poster, and placard (in the narrower sense), 2) a more detailed classification based on the type of content into leaflet-poster, ideological-political poster, program poster, action poster, authority poster, poster-placard, group poster, and ceremonial poster; 3) a classification based on the message carriers into personalized and non-personalized posters; and 4) a classification based on the method of display or distribution into large, small, and standard-sized posters; wall posters; roll-up banner; leaflets; banners; and sticker-posters.

If we look at the classifications provided by Slavujević (2009) and apply them to the posters we are analyzing, we can conclude that, based on the basic classification, the posters in question fall into the category of placards – "a combination of image and text" (Slavujević 2009: 232). In the more detailed classification based on the type of representative content, the posters analyzed belong to the group of program posters – "which express a position on a specific issue" (Slavujević 2009: 232). When it comes to the classification based on message carriers, the analyzed posters fall into the non-personalized category – "featuring images of one or more anonymous individuals, unsigned statements, slogans, etc." (Slavujević 2009: 233); and according to the distribution method, they belong to the first group, that of placards in large, small, or standard sizes – "which are posted in designated areas for posters (advertising boards, billboards, special advertising panels, etc.)" (Slavujević 2009: 233).

Subject, goal, hypothesis, and corpus description

This study analyzes posters from the Instagram profile *Filfak Blokada* through the lens of political communication functions and linguistic analysis, focusing on the student protests of 2024/2025. The objective is to identify which linguistic tools are used to convey political communication functions and which functions or combinations of functions are present in the posters. Our hypothesis is that the posters will primarily feature a blend of informative and persuasive functions, as the purpose of political posters is to inform the public about upcoming actions and encourage participation in these actions (Dezelan & Maksuti 2012).

The poster corpus was gathered from the *Filfak Blokada* Instagram profile, starting from December 27, the date the profile was created, up until February 6, two months after the blockade of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš and three months after the canopy collapse in Novi Sad. Only posters with information about the organization of the student protests were included. In total, 17 posters were collected, labeled as POSTER01 for the first poster, with numbers assigned based on the publication date, from the oldest to the most recent.

Analysis of Posters During the Student Protests in Niš Using the Example of the Instagram Profile Filfak Blokada

In this section of the paper, we analyze the posters from the student protests in the Republic of Serbia, specifically focusing on the Instagram profile *Filfak*

Blokada, while taking into account the functions of political communication and the linguistic tools used to convey them. The analysis revealed that the posters primarily employ either the informative function alone or a combination of the informative and persuasive functions (see the quantitative data in Table 1). Therefore, we conclude that our hypothesis is only partially supported.

Table 1: Quantitative analysis

Type of function	Number of posters
Informative	8
Informative + Persuasive	8
Persuasive	1

The informative function is represented in examples 1–8. In examples 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8, the exact time and location are provided, indicating when and where the protest will take place. In example 4, only the time is given, while in example 7, only the location is mentioned. Information about just the time or place is provided when the action is already known and the location has been established (the previous case), or when the poster is part of a post containing multiple posters, and the time has already been mentioned in the previous one (the latter case). In terms of information about the location, this can be explicitly conveyed using specific urban toponyms (Crveni Pevac, Dr. Zoran Đinđić Boulevard, Dušanov Bazaar, Most Mladosti), which are "names of location that are integral parts of a city and refer to parts of the city (neighborhoods, districts), squares, or streets" (Trajković, 2021: 11), or, less commonly, the use of oikonyms – as in example 7, where the name of the settlement Merošina is mentioned. Location information is also given implicitly, such as "the intersection near the Court and Law Faculty," "the bridge near Roda," "the bridge near Delta," or "the bridge near DIS," when there is no specific urban toponym. Regarding the structure of location names, only one example uses a noun (see example 7, Merošina), while the rest feature noun phrases. Temporal localization is done through nouns – Sunday (example 3), Saturday (example 7) – or prepositional-case constructions and phrases (at 11:52 [6], at 4 p.m., until 8 p.m., 2 p.m., January 17). These examples provide citizens with information on current political events and actions. All of the information shared targets the rational component of the audience's attitude, which is a key characteristic of the informative function of political communication.

In a number of cases, the reason for holding the protest is also mentioned (examples 2, 5, 7, and 8). In most cases, the sentences are elliptical and typically contain noun phrases (e.g., example 1 – NEW YEAR, NEW PROTEST, COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY, rather than NEW YEAR IS HERE, NEW PROTEST IS HERE, THIS IS A COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY – examples 3, 4, 5). A small number of examples

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[6] In many of the extracted examples, 11:52 is mentioned as the time, which holds symbolic meaning, as the canopy in Novi Sad collapsed at that very time.

in the posters, besides elliptical sentences, also contain complete sentences – as in example 2 – YOU CANNOT TRAMPLE US BECAUSE THE JUDICIARY IS NOT WORKING – and in examples 6 and 7 (ENOUGH SILENCE; DEMANDS HAVE NOT BEEN MET).

1. NEW YEAR, NEW PROTEST... COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY... 14. 01. 2025. 7:00 a.m. (POSTER05)
2. Due to today's attempted murder of a colleague in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. URGENT BLOCKADE OF THE INTERSECTION AT THE COURT AND FACULTY OF LAW. YOU CANNOT TRAMPLE US BECAUSE THE JUDICIARY IS NOT WORKING (POSTER06)
3. PROTEST MARCH. CRVENI PEVAC. FRIDAY, JANUARY 17. AT 11:52 a.m. MAIN COURT BUILDING (FIFTEEN-MINUTE SILENCE). DUŠANOV BAZAR. DR. ZORAN DJINDJIĆ BOULEVARD. MEDICAL FACULTY (POSTER07)
4. SUNDAY (POSTER13)
5. URGENT SUPPORT ACTION to the students of the University of Novi Sad from the students of the University of Niš. Blockade of the roundabout near Delta until 8:00 p.m. Tuesday, January 28. Basic Court Building at 4:00 p.m. (POSTER14)
6. FOUR AT FOUR. SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2. ALL AT 4 p.m. YOUTH BRIDGE. DELTA BRIDGE. RODA BRIDGE. DIS BRIDGE. ENOUGH SILENCE. (POSTER15)
7. FIFTEEN VICTIMS. ZERO RESPONSIBLE. YOUTH BRIDGE. DELTA BRIDGE... RODA BRIDGE. DIS BRIDGE. DEMANDS HAVE NOT BEEN MET (POSTER16)
8. MEROŠINA. SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2025. 2:00 p.m. Protest in support of targeted students and professors. (POSTER17)

The combination of the informative and persuasive functions is observed in posters 9–17. The informative function in these examples is demonstrated through spatial and temporal identification (in examples 9–12, and in examples 13, 14, and 16), while example 15 only provides temporal information. Regarding spatial information, urbanonyms are used (for instance, in example 9 – King Milan Square; in example 12 – Banovina; in example 13 – Faculty of Law; in example 16 – Red Cross camp, Knjaževačka, Nitex, King Milan Square, Appellate Court, Palilula Ramp, Medical Faculty). Most urbanonyms are noun phrases (King Milan Square, Appellate Court), while a few examples use a single noun – Banovina, Nitex. Evidently, various types of urbanonyms are involved, from names of squares and streets (Knjaževačka) to faculties (Faculty of Law, Medical Faculty), companies (Nitex), and parts of the city (Palilula Ramp). In several examples, location identification is given descriptively using noun phrases – Basic Court building (examples 10 and 11), intersection at the Court (example 13), intersection Office, roundabout Jagodina Mala, roundabout Trošarina (example 14). Temporal identification in these examples is expressed by dates, such as January 3 (example 10), January 10 (example 11), and by using days

and dates – Sunday, January 12 (example 12), or just days (examples 15 and 16: Friday and Sunday), with exact times provided (example 9 – 11:00 p.m., example 10 – 11:52, example 11 – 11:52, 12:07, example 12 – 4:00 p.m., example 13 – 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., example 14 – 4:00 p.m., example 15 – 11:52, example 16 – 4:00 p.m.). The persuasive function, identified in nearly all of the examples, represents a call to action and unity, achieved through the use of:

1. Negations of the verbs "*to have*" and "*to meet*" in the 3rd person, and the noun "*action*" (example 9);
2. 1st person plural imperative of the verb "*to stop*" (examples 10, 11), and 2nd person singular imperative of this verb (example 15), as well as the verb "*to see*" (examples 11, 13);
3. Use of the 2nd person singular imperative of the verb "*to show up*" (example 12);
4. Use of the 2nd person singular imperative of the verb "*to go*" and the personal pronoun "*you*," inviting the reader to be part of the action (example 14);
5. Use of the noun "*rush*" (example 16).

9. NO NEW YEAR'S EVE. DEMANDS HAVE NOT BEEN MET! ACTION ON NEW YEAR'S EVE. KING MILAN SQUARE, 23:00 (POSTER01)
10. LET'S STOP. STUDENTS FOR THE VICTIMS IN NOVI SAD, CETINJE, AND ARILJE. MAIN COURT BUILDING. FRIDAY, JANUARY 3. AT 11:52. SEE YOU! (POSTER02)
11. LET'S STOP! MAIN COURT BUILDING. FRIDAY, JANUARY 10. FROM 11:52 TO 12:07. SEE YOU! (POSTER03)
12. PROTEST. SHOW UP AT BANOVINA. SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 16:00. PROTEST MARCH OF STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ AND CITIZENS (POSTER04)
13. From 19:00, we block the intersection by the court! At 20:00, we head to the Law Faculty. DEAR STUDENTS AND CITIZENS, SEE YOU! (POSTER09)
14. The hunt has begun. SUNDAY, 16:00. ROUNDABOUT JAGODIN MALA. ROUNDABOUT TROŠARINA. URED INTERSECTION. START YOURS TOO! (POSTER10)
15. PROTEST MARCH. 11:52, FRIDAY. STOP. (POSTER11)
16. SUNDAY, 16:00. RED CROSS CAMP. KNJAZEVAČKA. NITEX. KING MILAN SQUARE. APPELLATE COURT. PALILULA RAMP. MEDICAL FACULTY. RUSH TO THE SQUARE! (POSTER12)

One of the examples contains only a persuasive function – example 17. In this example, the function is realized through the use of the 1st person plural imperative of the verbs "to rise" and "to see," as well as the number one and the pronouns "all" and "we." These linguistic elements are used with the aim of prompting action and creating a sense of collective unity.

17. LET'S RISE AGAINST ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND ATTACK. An attack on ONE of us is an attack on ALL of us! SEE YOU THERE!

(POSTER08)

This method of communication via online posters motivates citizens to engage in political activities according to the intentions of the persuaders, or the poster creators. Brief and clear messages like: *"stop," "join us," "see you," "the hunt has started,"* and *"action"* encourage action and collective involvement. The subject who does persuading frequently evokes emotions such as fear, anger, or, in this case, hope and pride during the persuasion process and connecting with the audience. Additionally, a key feature of persuasive tactics is the repetition of core messages – in several cases, we observe the repeated use of phrases like "*stop*" (poster02, poster03, poster11) and "*demands not met*" (poster01, poster16). The analyzed set of posters clearly demonstrates the intentional selection of textual elements meant to stir emotions in citizens and drive them toward political action.

Conclusion

This paper examines posters extracted from the Instagram profile of Filfak Blokada between December 27 and February 6. These posters were created during the large-scale student protests in the Republic of Serbia in 2024/2025, which were organized after the tragic deaths of fifteen people caused by the collapse of a canopy at the Railway Station in Novi Sad. The aim of the paper is to explore how political communication functions are applied in the creation of posters in the online environment and which linguistic tools are used to achieve these functions.

The research indicates that the dominant function is informative, and it appears either on its own or combined with the persuasive function. This partially confirms our hypothesis that most posters will feature a combination of informative and persuasive functions. The informative function is usually conveyed through nominal words that inform citizens about the time and location of the gathering. When paired with the persuasive function, the aim is to encourage citizens to take action. As a result, alongside nominal words, verbs are used, typically in the imperative form of the second-person singular or first-person plural, to create a sense of unity. Since this research is one of the first empirical studies examining the structure of posters within a specific sociological, historical, and political context, it contributes in two key ways: 1. empirically, it is important as it provides insight into the linguistic tools used and how political communication functions are implemented; 2. theoretically, it is valuable as it sheds light on the process of creating posters in the online environment, thereby expanding the role and fate of posters as discussed by Slavujević (2009). When considering Slavujević's definition of political communication as the exchange of messages between actors, this research also contributes on a broader scale – in the field of examining strategies used in political communication. The poster, as one of the major tools of political communication throughout history, takes on a new dimension in the online space, with the key participants being the protest organizers – students – and the intended audience – the citizens of the Republic of Serbia.

Since the research focuses on a single segment – the Instagram profile of Filfak

Blokada – and a specific time period, this represents the main limitation of the study. Nevertheless, the results and analysis clearly suggest that this pilot study and its methodological approach should be considered for more comprehensive research to capture the current political and linguistic landscape during the major student blockades, an area the authors plan to investigate further in the future.

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Analiza plakata tokom studentskih protesta u Nišu na primeru Instagram profila Filfak blokada

Neven Obradović, Docent, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija
Ivana Mitić, Vanredni profesor, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

U ovom radu analiziraju se plakati sa Instagram profila Filfak blokada koji prate studentski protest u Nišu 2024/2025. Cilj je da se iz perspektive funkcija političkog komuniciranja utvrdi koja je dominantna funkcija, te koja su jezička sredstva iskorišćena kako bi se ta funkcija realizovala. Korpus čini 17 plakata ekscerpiranih sa pomenutog profila u periodu od 27. decembra do 6. februara. Rezultati sprovedenog istraživanja pokazuju da je dominantna funkcija informativna, a da se na nemalom broju plakata javlja i kombinacija informativne i persuazivne funkcije, i to onda kada prethodni neki značajan događaj.

Ključne reči: srpski jezik, političko komuniciranje, Instagram, funkcije političkog komuniciranja, studentski protest, plakat

What Does Love Have To Do With This: Gendered Representation of Writers and Their Creative Process in Different Cinema Productions

Nataša Simeunović Bajić[12], Associate Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia,

Dorina Xheraj-Subashi[3], Lecturer, Faculty of Business, Aleksandër Moisiu University in Durrës, Albania,

Anna Carroll[4], Independent Researcher, United States of America

Abstract

The research addresses in what way romantic films manage to display the bond that exists between love and writing. This thematic representation brings additional information to current literature on movie narratives and emotional experiences extending knowledge about depiction of these issues on a screen. The research is based on media, narratives and semiotics. This perspective plays an important role in dealing with the problems of formation and the purpose within the structure of film narrative, which provides a reliable framework for the study. The paper examines how the writers relate to their subjects in different types of world cinema. It explores how these relations have been dealt with in different societies and contains both general ideas and more specific cultural aspects. Such a study is important for the view-making of the issue of creativity in the structure of cinematic storytelling.

Keywords: film, creative process, cinematic expression, love, writer

What Does Love Have To Do With This: Gendered Representation of Writers and Their Creative Process in Different Cinema Productions

Introduction

Love and creativity have long been intertwined themes in cinema, particularly within the romantic genre's portrayal of writers and their creative processes. Writing is a very private act that involves feelings, emotions and experiences and that is why creative writing is very personal. All types of love are important in the creative writing process as they are the main components of the stories. Regardless of its manifestation - be it romantic love, self-love, passion, or an affinity for the

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1 Corresponding author: natasa.simeunovic.bajic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

[2] ORCID: 0000-0002-4434-8282

[3] ORCID: 0000-0003-4896-2279

[4] ORCID: 0009-0000-6758-4811

art of writing - love exerts a profound influence on the writer and the narratives they construct. However, the selected films depict romantic heterosexual love. This exploration delves into how romantic entanglements influence the artistic expression of writers, revealing both the inspiring and challenging dimensions of love.

Actually, portraying writers in film is a complex issue as well, one that illustrates the ways different social milieus shape our attitudes to love and imagination. This exploration feels particularly apt in the romantic space, which often tells these very blurry personal/professional narratives all wrapped up by relationships that define a writer's career arc. Films like *Shadows in the Sun* (2005), *Copie conforme* (*Certified copy*) (2016), *Nuestros amantes* (*Our lovers*) (2016), and *Бестселлер по любви* (*Love-inspired bestseller*) (2016) situate those questions at their core while offering a dense narrative on love: one that presents a challenge in conveying the themes explored in the studied films — with in-depth reflections or balance between the realism-symbolization of feelings.

Such reflections are based largely on cultural contexts, which influence the way writers in these films have ended up shown to us, asking whether it impacts how society responds and reacts with love and creativity. Through this cultural lens, the stories become more vibrant with varied points of view that contrast with pre-assumed gender roles and expectations. For example, they frequently depict men and women in manners which comply with or challenge established norms indicative of wider cultural ideologies on both gender and creativity (see Smith 2018; Johnson 2020; Davis, 2023).

However, this depiction of writers and their love lives is influential beyond what can be seen on-screen. While we are entertained, they will also subtly affect how these types of others—the real-life writers who try to figure out what is going on in their private lives—see themselves. A cliche in a lot of movies is to have the love life of a writer being closely related to their creative way as well. Then, all too often writers develop both preconceived ideas of what an art career looks like and a happily-ever-after romance.

The portrayals strike a powerful note with the audience, further emphasizing how love itself can be inspirational. These often depict love as a necessary element for the creative process, suggesting that without inspiration from a muse or an artistically-fulfilling relationship with another person, a writer will cease to be able to produce writing. That said, such examples can also serve to reinforce certain stereotypes that maintain misconceptions and promote tropes about romance. Furthermore, cinema, as a cultural artifact, serves as a reflection of societal values, norms, and gender dynamics. The representation of love in film is particularly noteworthy, as it not only mirrors but also influences societal perceptions of relationships, gender roles, and emotional expression.

Across different cinematic traditions – Western and Eastern, mainstream and independent – the representation of love varies significantly, influenced by cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts. This study explores how love is depicted across different cinema, with a particular focus on the gendered representation of love and how the writing process contributes to these portrayals.

Methodology

The paper outlines a clear and structured methodology. This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research approach grounded in interpretivism (Creswell, 2013; Schwartz-Shea) to look at the ways images of femininity and masculinity are portrayed in concepts of love in Western and Eastern cinema (Kaplan, 2013; Dissanayake, 2013; Attwood, 1993; Leontyeva, Koltsova & Verhoeven, 2024). Such an approach means that in-depth meaning of phenomena as practiced by humans should be grasped. In relation to this research, interpretivism will help us better understand the interaction of different cultures with the perception and representation of gender through the use of cinematic patterns (Butler, 1990; Williams, L. & Gledhill, 2000; Kim, Kim, Kan, 2019). Based on a choice of films from both traditions, this study aims to identify the gender dynamics and culture that underlie those representations. The study is cross- sectional and confined to movies from Western cinema and Eastern cinema with a special reference to Russia and Iran.

Employing a lens of subjective interpretation and analysis with respect to cinematic narratives, we delve into an exploration of the complex relationship between love and creativity as depicted in live-action romantic films about writers. By analyzing the selected films through a close reading of their narratives and character representations, we will uncover patterns and themes related to love and creativity. The cultural contexts of each film will be considered to understand how societal attitudes shape the portrayal of writers and their relationships.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- In what way do romantic films represent the complex interplay between love and the creative writing process?
- How is love represented differently in Western and Eastern cinema?
- In what ways does the gender of the characters influence the portrayal of love?
- How does the writing process as portrayed in different cinematic traditions contribute to the gendered representation of love?

Research objectives:
- Analyze the portrayal of love as both a muse and a source of conflict within the creative process of writers depicted in romantic films.
- Examine the ways in which cultural contexts shape the representation of writers and their romantic relationships in these films.
- Investigate the potential impact of cinematic depictions on real-life authors' perceptions of the relationship between love and creativity.
- Critically evaluate the extent to which these films may perpetuate unrealistic expectations about romance and the artistic journey.

Thus, the aim of the given study is to conceive the representations of love across various cinematic cultures and discuss the impact of the writing process on such representations with references to gender. Therefore, the goal of this work is to investigate gender relations in the representations of love in Western and Eastern

cinema and promote better understanding of the interplay between gender and media discourse.

Data Collections and Analysis

The films used in the study are selected from a list that best represents the cinematic traditions under consideration. The selection criteria for the films in this study are twofold: firstly, the movies chosen must feature love as their central thematic focus; secondly, they need to meet at least one of two additional criteria - either possessing significant cultural impact or having received critical acclaim within their respective cinematic traditions. The focus is made on the representation of gender roles and relations, the roles of male and female characters, the structure of the relationships between male and female characters, and the narrative patterns that support or subvert gender roles and relations.

Thematic analysis is used to analyze the films because it involves identifying themes and patterns concerning gender and love. Particular emphasis is placed on the conversations, the characters, and the plots that are associated with the representation of love. It also takes into account the cultural and historical background of these films because these are the main factors that define the gendered representation of love.

Comparisons are made between the films to identify commonalities and differences in their depictions of love and creativity, as well as their treatment of gender roles and stereotypes.

This work will help to continue the discussion on the link between love and creativity especially as it applies to writers and writing. Accordingly, by analyzing this aspect of the popular romantic movies, we can better understand how the cultural discourses influence our perception of creativity and roles of the relationships within it. Moreover, this study reveals the significance of the gender-oriented approach to the examination of the media representations, as films are capable of strengthening or subverting gendered perceptions of the society. Knowledge of how writers are depicted in such stories can be useful in the debate about the portrayal of diversity in literature and cinema.

Additionally, this research aims to offer a complex understanding of the relationship between love and creativity and to provoke reflection about the stories that are presented to readers and the effects they may have on actual writers and readers.

Finally, the exploration of gender representation in literature and media reveals significant insights into how narratives shape societal perceptions of gender roles, particularly in the context of love and creativity. This study synthesizes findings from various research papers to highlight the complexities of these representations.

Literature Review

Contemporary literature often presents a duality in gender representation, with some works challenging traditional norms while others reinforce stereotypes. For instance, Ladzekpo et al. found that while many characters defy conventional roles,

others still embody traditional gender stereotypes, particularly in genres such as science fiction and fantasy (Ladzekpo, Attiye, Davi, 2024). Bansiwal's analysis of Indian women writers illustrates how authors like Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri navigate and critique gender norms, contributing to a broader dialogue on gender representation in literature. Regarding film representation, Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," introduces the concept of the male gaze, arguing that cinema is structured around a patriarchal perspective that objectifies women. This framework is essential for understanding how romantic films can reinforce gender stereotypes and influence audience perceptions of love and relationships (Mulvey, 1975). Kaplan's work, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, provides a feminist critique of film, focusing on the representation of women in cinema. The book discusses the concept of the male gaze and its implications for the portrayal of female characters in romantic narratives. Kaplan's analysis reveals how these representations can perpetuate stereotypes and impact societal expectations of gender roles in love (Kaplan, 1983). The literature on gendered representations of love in films reveals a complex interplay between cinematic narratives and societal norms.

Igrec looks at gender stereotypes in romantic comedies, dividing comedy movies into old and modern versions. The study examines whether the depiction of gender roles has advanced across popular films produced in 2010 and contrasting them with those released in 2020. This research adopts a more discursive approach to the way these representations shape audience perceptions and broader societal norms concerning gender identities and love (Igrec, 2022). The article by Saha delves into how cinematic narratives are affecting widespread understanding about love and relationships. The author believes that movies tend to romanticize love, in turn provoking unrealistic hopes upon viewers. The analysis details the implications for the way these portrayals work to solidify or destabilize current cultural understandings of gender in romantic relationships (Saha, 2024). Handayanti et al. examined gender representation in television films, revealing that media often perpetuates gender biases, portraying women as materialistic and men as unfaithful, which can skew public perceptions. The portrayal of women in animated films, as discussed in the study on "The Princess and the Frog," shows that female characters often face societal struggles, reinforcing traditional gender dynamics (Handayanti, 2024).

The intersection of love and creativity in narratives can reflect and shape audience perceptions of gender roles. Research indicates that media representations can either challenge or reinforce societal attitudes, impacting real-life authors and their creative processes (Murtza, 2023). While these studies underscore the importance of critically examining gender representation in literature and media, it is also essential to recognize that some narratives may offer progressive portrayals that inspire change and challenge stereotypes. This duality highlights the ongoing evolution of gender dynamics in cultural narratives. Despite this, many films still provide stereotypical representations of gender roles and love and there is a shift towards portraying love in different ways. This evolution is due to changes in society

and the constant discussions of gender roles and gender identification in modern media. There is a notable shift towards more diverse portrayals of love and identity, reflecting the evolving landscape of societal norms. This evolution is influenced by ongoing discussions surrounding gender roles and the complexities of gender identification, which challenge the traditional binary framework.

As we explore the evolution of love in film, it is essential to consider the concept of gendered representation. In this article, the term refers to the ways in which love is often framed as a distinctly male or female experience. The gendered representation of love in Western and Eastern cinema reveals significant cultural divergences, particularly when examining Russian and Iranian traditions. While Western films often portray women as independent and assertive, Eastern cinema frequently depicts female characters as restrained and submissive, reflecting broader societal norms. Western narratives typically emphasize female empowerment, showcasing characters who challenge traditional roles and assert their independence (Yuanyuan, 2024). The portrayal of love often aligns with themes of personal freedom and individual choice, as seen in various romantic comedies and dramas (Nargiza, 2024).

In contrast, Eastern films, such as those from Iran and Russia, often depict women in more traditional roles, emphasizing familial duty and emotional restraint (Yuanyuan, 2024).

The cultural backdrop, influenced by historical and socio-economic factors, shapes these representations, with women often portrayed as nurturing figures within the family structure (Nargiza, 2024; Yuanyuan, 2024).

The differences in representation stem from distinct cultural ideologies: Western humanism promotes individual rights, while Eastern traditions often reflect Confucian or Ortodox values that prioritize community and familial roles. This divergence is evident in the cinematic portrayal of love, where Western films celebrate romantic autonomy, while Eastern narratives often highlight love's connection to duty and sacrifice (Moussaoui, 2024; Yi, 2024).

Despite these differences, the gender study in cinema aims at reaching certain conclusions, which is, looking for progressive change in the love and gender representations in the films, holding ongoing re-ordering of power relations and entrenched norms within this representation. While several studies have established how film representations of romance and gender roles impact on society's views of these relationships, this study seeks to formulate how those film representations shape the cultural values and perspectives of the viewing audience and potentially influence the work of real-world writers. At the same time, when we look deeply into these processes, we will try to support the relevance of such an analysis of the content of films aimed at construction of dominant cultural ideas.

Both traditions grapple with evolving gender roles, suggesting a complex interplay between cultural representation and societal change. Yet, there is a noted deficiency in studies that compare how various cultures represent love and creativity in film. The paper emphasizes the need for more cross-cultural analyses to understand the diverse narratives that emerge from different cultural backgrounds.

Nevertheless, this paper endeavors to explore those intricacies beyond the stereotypical preconceptions that have often set East against West. In this regard, it hopes to uncover the subtle differences in meaning lying beneath the surface.

Pen and Gender: How Film Shapes Writers and Their Creations

Our study illustrates the importance of examining media representations through a gender-oriented lens and how films can either reiterate or challenge societal norms surrounding gender roles, often in combination with stereotypes. The ways in which writers contribute to these narratives help actualize what diverse voices actually mean, both on the page and screen. Because of that, this study is cross-cultural in comparison between various cinematic traditions and exhibits the cultural contingency of media representation. The goal is to shed light on the complex interplay between media representations and societal attitudes towards gender roles, with the hope of promoting more inclusive and accurate portrayals in the future.

For the analysis, films from four different cinema traditions were selected, two of which can be considered closer to what we call Eastern cinematography. In fact, the Russian film certainly does not belong to Western cinematography, and the French-Iranian film, although it has Western actors, is directed by a filmmaker of Iranian origin and introduces some non-Western elements. Although *Shadows in the Sun* is a co-production, we classify it as an American or Western film because it is directed by an American born in Hollywood.

When we talk about the significance of the chosen films: American, Russian, French, and Spanish, these are all very powerful productions that have left a deep impression on the history of film. To better understand the four selected films that serve as case studies here, we employed a combination of thematic and semiotic analyses.

Shadows in the Sun (2005) is a character-driven film that delves into themes of creativity, personal growth, and the complexities of human connection. The narrative revolves around Jeremy, an aspiring writer, who is sent to rural Italy to seek out the reclusive author, Weldon Parish. Through their interactions, the film explores the transformative power of mentorship and the importance of finding inspiration. Weldon, haunted by the loss of his wife, who was also his muse, has struggled with writer's block. His daughter, Isabella, becomes a new source of inspiration for Jeremy, mirroring the influence her mother once had on Weldon. These intergenerational relationships highlight the cyclical nature of creativity and the enduring impact of loss and love. The film's exploration of writer's block, the search for meaning, and the healing power of art makes it a compelling watch for those interested in the creative process and the human condition.

In *Our Lovers* (2016) Carlos, a frustrated screenwriter in his 40s, and Irene, a dreamy woman in her 30s, meet in a bookstore café. Irene proposes a game to transform their mundane lives into an adventure, establishing a rule that they must not fall in love. As they embark on a series of meetings without sharing personal

details, their connection deepens, and they begin to break the initial rules. The film delves into the intricate complexities of love and human connection, exploring themes of self-discovery, boundaries, and the interplay between fiction and reality. The film's characters confront their past disappointments and seek new possibilities for happiness, while the meta-narrative structure invites viewers to consider how narratives shape personal experiences. However, the inclusion of crude humor and pacing issues detract from the film's overall impact, leaving the audience with a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion that challenges conventional narrative resolutions.

The plot of *Бестселлер по любви* (Love-inspired bestseller) (2016) follows Konstantin (Kostia), a womanizing writer who finds inspiration in his romantic conquests. He secretly observes his latest interest, Asya, posing as a librarian he believes will be easy to seduce due to her unconventional looks. Confident in his charm, he bets a friend that he can win her over, unaware of the unexpected consequences that await him. The film explores several key themes, including conquest and manipulation in romantic relationships, the role of creativity and inspiration in writing fueled by love affairs, prejudices towards appearance and the evaluation of individuals, as well as the consequences of dishonest behavior and gambling with love. The main character, Konstantin, is a writer-seducer who uses women as muses for his inspiration. The film also delves into the relationship between art and morality. It suggests that inspiration or artistic expression does not justify unethical conduct in one's personal life. Characters who seek to justify their actions through their artistic pursuits ultimately face the consequences of their dishonesty. By exploring these themes, the film encourages viewers to reflect on the importance of authenticity, empathy, and moral integrity in relationships.

Certified Copy (2010) explores the complexities of love, identity, and the blurred lines between reality and performance in a single day. Through the enigmatic relationship between a French woman and visiting author James Miller, the film delves into themes of authenticity in art and relationships. The couple's playful masquerade as a married couple, sparked by a misunderstanding, becomes a catalyst for introspection, questioning the nature of truth and the masks we wear in love. A leitmotif on "copies" extends beyond art, prompting viewers to question the blurred lines between performance and genuine connection. Ultimately, *Certified Copy* challenges conventional notions of romance and authenticity, leaving a lingering invitation to ponder the essence of love and the elusive nature of truth. Thus, truth, originality, copies, and play are the central themes of this film, which is so complex in its simplicity and showcases the reach of cinematic art in exploring this narrative.

In semiotic analysis, the meaning within films is understood as a complex interplay of signs and symbols that convey specific cultural, ideological, and emotional messages. Such analysis in the field of film studies can reveal themes and motifs, with semiotics revealing how those thematic elements are expressed through signs and symbols to produce an elaborate code that enriches audience interpretations. Every visual, auditory or textual sign in a film could be analyzed from the perspective of semiotics; as such it provides an engine for thematic expression that can translate ideas and emotions into something resonant with viewers on multiple levels. This back-and-forth between

thematic analysis and semiotics illustrates how filmmakers use visual metaphors, sound motifs, and narrative structures to drive their central focus points home to viewers through guiding what emotions are felt by the audience in certain moments.

Table 1. Analysis

Film Title (English)	Year	Screenwriter	Director	Genre	Main Actors	Main Characters	Setting	Beginning	Ending	Semiosis
Shadows in the Sun	2005	Brad Mirman	Brad Mirman	Drama, Romantic Comedy	Harvey Keitel, Joshua Jackson, Claire Forlani	Jeremy, Weldon Parish, Isabella Parish	Tuscany	Joshua wakes up and gets ready for work.	Riding a horse alongside a train; a bird is released from a cage.	Literal Freedom
Copied (or Certified Copy)	2010	Abbas Kiarostami	Abbas Kiarostami	Drama, Melodrama	Juliette Binoche, William Shimell	Elle, James Miller	Tuscany	A book with the same title as the film is on the table with two microphones.	Church bells seen through a window frame.	Self-reflection
Our Lovers	2016	Miguel Ángel Lamata	Miguel Ángel Lamata	Drama, Romantic Comedy	Eduardo Noriega, Michelle Jenner	Carlos, Irene	Zaragoza	Carlos has his first cognac in a bookshop café.	Carlos and Irene sit and talk.	Interpersonal connection
Bestseller of Love	2016	Olga Zhabin	Nikolai Mikhailov	Melodrama	Ilya Bledny, Maria Kozakova	Konstantin, Asya	Russia	A woman runs scared at night.	Konstantin and Asya embrace.	Emotional connection

The table provided gives an overview of four films, which can be analyzed through the lens of semiotics to reveal how these films represent love and the creative writing process.

Shadows in the Sun (2005)
- Setting and Characters: The film is set in Tuscany, Italy, a region often associated with artistic inspiration and the beauty of nature. The main characters, Jeremy and Weldon Parish, are depicted in a picturesque environment, which plays a significant role in their creative processes.
- Semiosis: The bird released from a cage and the image of riding alongside a train symbolize freedom and the journey of the creative spirit. The bird represents the liberation of creative potential, while the train symbolizes the passage of time and the journey of life. These symbols are crucial in understanding the characters' internal transformations and their relationship with creativity.
- Analysis: The film uses nature and the setting as a metaphor for the characters' emotional states and creative struggles. The use of symbols like the bird and train reflects the dynamic between confinement and freedom, a theme central to the creative process. *Shadows in the Sun* explores the life and artistic process of writers, focusing on the archetype of the lost genius. The character of Weldon Parish, a once-famous writer, represents the artist who retreats into solitude. The film also explores the intergenerational dynamic relationship between Jeremy and Weldon Parish, highlighting the power of love for art as both inspiration and a limitation. The film continues the tradition of American films exploring the dual nature of artistic passion.

Nuestros amantes (*Our Lovers*, 2016)
- Setting and Characters: The film is set in Zaragoza, Spain, focusing on Carlos and Irene, whose relationship blossoms in a bookstore cafe, a space that symbolizes knowledge, creativity, and introspection.
- Semiosis: The film begins with Carlos having his first cognac in the café-library, a symbolic act that initiates his journey into the complexities of love and creativity. The ending, where Carlos and Irene sit and talk, symbolizes the completion of their emotional and creative journeys, with conversation as the key to both love and creativity.
- Analysis: The bookstore cafe setting is rich with semiotic meaning, representing a space where love and creativity intersect. The recurring motif of conversation emphasizes the role of dialogue in both romantic and creative processes, suggesting that understanding and expression are central to both. This film continues the Spanish cinematic tradition of exploring love and creativity in urban settings, with a focus on intellectual characters and the power of dialogue. It builds upon the legacy of Spanish filmmakers who have long been interested in the intersection of romantic relationships and artistic pursuits, presenting these themes with a mix of

depth, humor, and symbolism characteristic of contemporary Spanish cinema.

Бестселлер по любви (*Love-inspired bestseller*, 2016)
- Setting and Characters: Although the setting is inferred to be Russia, the film's cultural context is crucial for understanding its semiotic landscape. The characters, Konstantin and Asya, navigate a world shaped by Russian traditions and contemporary challenges.
- Semiosis: The opening scene of a woman running scared at night symbolizes the fear and uncertainty that often accompany love and creativity in the Russian cultural context. The final embrace between Konstantin and Asya represents resolution, but within a framework of sacrifice and endurance, themes common in Russian melodrama.
- Analysis: The film employs a semiotic language that reflects the cultural nuances of Russian cinema, where love is often intertwined with themes of struggle and endurance. The embrace at the end signifies not just a romantic resolution but also a deeper acceptance of life's hardships, a recurring motif in Russian storytelling.

Copie conforme (*Certified Copy*, 2010)
- Setting and Characters: Set again in Tuscany, Italy, the film features Elle and James Miller, whose interactions explore the nature of authenticity in art and relationships.
- Semiosis: The opening scene with a book titled "Certified Copy" and two microphones sets the stage for a discussion on originality and imitation, themes central to the narrative. The church bells seen through a window frame at the end of the film serve as a reminder of tradition and the passage of time, contrasting with the modern, secular lives of the characters.
- Analysis: The film engages with signs of authenticity and imitation, questioning the nature of reality in both art and love. The church bells, a traditional symbol, juxtapose with the characters' modern dilemmas, highlighting the tension between the old and the new in both personal and creative domains. *Certified Copy* represents a unique synthesis of French and Iranian cinematic traditions. It combines the intellectual rigor and relationship complexities often found in French cinema with the philosophical depth and narrative ambiguity characteristic of Iranian art films. This blend results in a work that challenges perceptions of reality, authenticity, and the nature of both art and love.

Discussion

In the realm of film analysis, semiotics offers a fascinating framework through which we can explore the themes of freedom and confinement, particularly as they relate to love and creativity. This interplay is vividly illustrated in both Western and

Eastern cinema, where cultural contexts shape the narrative and symbolic elements. Western films *Shadows in the Sun* and *Nuestros amantes* celebrate personal liberation, portraying characters who embark on journeys of self-discovery. The settings — such as the picturesque landscapes of Tuscany — are not just beautiful backdrops; they symbolize artistic freedom and the potential for creative expression. In these narratives, love is depicted as a force that empowers individuals to break free from societal constraints. The characters' experiences resonate with viewers who value individualism and the pursuit of passion.

In contrast, Eastern films like *Бестселлер по любви* delve into the complexities of tradition versus modernity. Here, societal norms often impose significant constraints on characters' lives, creating a palpable tension between their desires for love and creativity and the expectations placed upon them by their culture. During the Soviet period of Russian cinema, women were shown as having equal value and portrayed roles on film that highlighted their physical strength (especially working in certain industrial jobs). These portrayals emphasized women's contributions to society and highlighted their ability to achieve remarkable feats, such as setting new records in various fields. The love stories in these films frequently function as a kind of subtext for larger tales of social progress. In post-Soviet Russian cinema, however, attitudes to love and gender rules have been modified in more and less subtle ways that resonate with Western romantic tropes on one hand but also stay true to Russian cultural (and historical) background. The implied Russian setting serves as a stark reminder of these limitations, where love is frequently portrayed as a struggle against both external pressures and internal conflicts. This dynamic highlights how cultural context can shape an individual's journey toward self-actualization. Here, the theme of sacrifice, well-known in Russian films, is once again utilized. In the act of sacrificing everything and starting from himself—without masks, lies, and manipulation—on the edge of social life and appearances, the main character undergoes a transformation.

In this case, it positions the American narrative, which is largely characterized by individual loss and a blockage of creativity, in contrast to the Spanish narrative that incorporates a more fantastical approach to explaining the artist's motivation. This difference shows how different societies graduate into the topic of creation and the need attached to it. Learning exactly, through some examples including the character of Jeremy in *Shadows in the Sun* we can show that the influence of love is a source of change and thus leads to creation. Such knowledge, on the other hand, assists in the analysis of characters in romantic films and helps to create how stories move forward.

The French-Iranian film is the most complex, yet the simplest in what we, as viewers, see on the screen as we follow the story. The film presents a complex yet straightforward cinematic experience that immerses viewers in the intimate story of two middle-aged individuals. Its narrative structure and visual style, while simple, effectively convey the intricacies of love and human connection. This minimalist approach highlights the protagonists' perspectives, allowing for a deeper emotional engagement. Ultimately, the film demonstrates that even the most intricate themes and

emotions can be expressed through a clear and focused lens, creating an immersive atmosphere that resonates with the audience.

However, all these films support a well-known stereotypical pattern according to which the writer must find their muse and improve their writing or overcome a block. In every film, the writer is a man and not a woman. Besides, these are not low-quality films created for quick consumption that are full of stereotypes and well-established patterns such as Hallmark romance productions. Therefore, one can rightfully ask why women writers who are looking for their muse are not featured in these films.

The answer to this question can certainly be found in the production of meaning of gender representation in film that confirms the already well-established relationships in the roles of men and women when it comes to the creative process. Male dominance and female subservience are old formulas that are still employed in films about writers and writing.

Concluding Remarks

This study has revealed a complex interaction between love and creativity in romantic films about writing in cultural context. We have found important cultural differences in the way American, Spanish, Russian and French-Iranian film narratives frame artists' motives and sources of inspiration, as we have shown by comparing them. Regarding the Western context and film genre, there is personal loss or a block of creativity which applies to many American films; however, Spanish films show another more whimsical and enigmatic vision behind artistic drive. This striking difference highlights the extreme power of cultural context over aesthetic representation.

The thematic examination of love and its effect on creativity within these films constructs a very complex insight into human relationships and the power of change associated with emotional experiences. It is evident through narrative and semiotic analyses that love serves as an impetus in driving characters toward personal and artistic fulfillment. This central theme lends not only a new richness to the screen representation of writers and their journeys but also underlines the interrelationships between love and the creative process.

In the analyzed films, male writers are depicted in ways that tend to stress existential crises, romantic difficulties or love stories and creative tensions which might serve in reproducing "masculine" cultural-imaginative strategies of men as the primary leaders of creativity. Women writers are often portrayed in subjugated and depersonalized roles, leaving viewers with few traces of a female perspective. Over time, this projection forms unconscious bias leading to a cultural perception of male gendered body's credibility over the other in authorship which undoubtedly impacts those who are starting out as writers and also professional opportunities. While these representations further our understanding of how masculinity understands creativity, they also fall prey to the suppression of female experience and more generally a restriction on diversity in art.

Overall, the research provides a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between love and the creative writing process in romantic cinema, contributing significant insights to film studies and cultural analysis.

Future research on gendered representation in romantic films should be directed at the independent female creator, the investigation of cultural contexts and intersectionality, and audience reception. These areas of concern could offer valuable insights into how gender dynamics operate within film and help inspire more inclusive storytelling.

Moving forward on these research agendas will enhance our understanding of the complex connection between love, creativity and cultural context in film. This series of investigations will continue to inform scholarly discussions as this action additionally teaches us how films manifest artists and artistic intentions, sensibilities — emotional processes. This enriched understanding, as we go forth, has the power to not only affect the making of cinema, but also the manner in which it is consumed, thus encouraging a kinder and more cine-aware way in film narration.

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Kakve veze ljubav ima s tim: rodno oblikovana reprezentacija pisaca i njihovog kreativnog procesa u različitim filmskim produkcijama

Nataša Simeunović Bajić, vanredni profesor, Filozofski fakultet,
Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija
Dorina Xheraj-Subashi, predavač, Fakultet za biznis, Aleksandar Mojsiju
Univerzitet u Draču, Albanija
Anna Carroll, nezavisni istraživač, Sjedinjene Američke Države

Apstrakt

Istraživanje se bavi pitanjem na koji način romantični filmovi uspevaju da prikažu vezu koja postoji između ljubavi i pisanja. Tematska reprezentacija donosi dodatne informacije u postojeću literaturu o filmskim narativima i emotivnim iskustvima, proširujući znanje o prikazivanju ovih pitanja na ekranu. Istraživanje je zasnovano na ulozi medija, narativima i semiotici. Ova perspektiva igra važnu ulogu u proučavanju problema formiranja i svrhe unutar strukture filmskog narativa, što pruža pouzdan okvir za analizu. Rad ispituje kako se pisci odnose prema svojim temama u različitim vrstama svetske kinematografije. Istražuje kako su ti odnosi obrađeni u različitim društvima i sadrži kako opšte ideje, tako i specifične kulturne aspekte. Ovakvo istraživanje je značajno za formiranje pogleda na pitanje kreativnosti u strukturi filmskog pripovedanja.

Ključne reči: film, kreativni proces, filmski izraz, ljubav, pisac

Representing Old Age and Aging in Serbian Press[1]

Jovana Trajković[2][3], Research Assistant, Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

Demographic data clearly indicate that the global population of older individuals is reaching unprecedented levels in human history. Nevertheless, negative attitudes and stereotypes toward the elderly remain persistent. Old age is a socio-historical and cultural construct, imbued with meanings attributed to it by society. Consequently, the role of the media in shaping and reproducing representations of older people is of considerable importance. This paper examines the manner in which the topics of aging and old age are represented, as well as the portrayal of older individuals in the Serbian press on October 1st, the International Day of Older Persons. Furthermore, the aim is to determine the extent of media coverage devoted to these topics in the Serbian daily press. The analysis encompasses four daily newspapers published in Serbia: the serious informative press (*Politika* and *Danas*) and the semi-tabloids (*Večernje novosti* and *Blic*). The study includes regular issues and special supplements published on October 1st from 2019 to 2024. The findings reveal that the topics of aging and old age are marginalized; while the coverage in serious newspapers is generally professional, a sensationalist approach is evident in the semi-tabloids.

Keywords: media, representation, ageism, stereotypes, International Day of Older Persons

Representing Old Age and Aging in Serbian Press

Introduction

Demographic data clearly show that there will be more elderly people in the world than ever before in human history, and the beginning of this trend is the time we live in. Despite this, negative attitudes, judgment, and stereotypes towards older people remain present (Gendron et al., 2016: 997). According to estimates by the United Nations, by 2050, 1 in 6 people in the world will be over 65 years old, compared to statistics from 2019, when 1 in 11 people belonged to this category (World Population Aging 2019). When it comes to Serbia, according to the most

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[2] Corresponding author: jovana.trajkovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

[3] ORCID: 0000-0002-4371-2716

recent population census by the Republic Institute for Statistics from 2022, the share of people aged 65 and older in the total population was slightly more than 22 percent (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2023). The observed increase in the number of elderly people in the world, as well as in Serbia[4] (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2011), is primarily a result of advancements in science, particularly medicine and pharmacy, along with technological development that has raised standards and quality of life, leading to increased life expectancy. In addition, almost all countries are experiencing a decline in birth rates, which also contributes to the rise in the number of elderlies in the overall population (Simić, Simić, 2008: 54).

Age is a social, historical and cultural category, as it is not valued in the same way everywhere. In this sense, the question of social construction involves not only who is considered old but also what is implied by that term (Iversen, Wilinska, 2020: 124). Demography, however, views age on a global level and has very precise criteria for defining an elderly population—demographically, "old population" conventionally refers to all individuals over 65 years of age (Devedžić, Stojilković, 2015: 12). On the other hand, the social status of the elderly, which is often unfavourable, is defined by culture and social circumstances themselves. For this reason, Simone de Beauvoir states: "Society determines an old person's place and role, taking into account their personal temperament, their sexual impotence, their experience" (de Beauvoir, 1987: 13).

What is characteristic of all discriminated groups is also characteristic for older individuals—they are spoken about in a simplified manner, through stereotypes and prejudices. Although the social group of those aged 65 and older is heterogeneous, it is often viewed as very homogeneous, with their needs, characteristics, and behaviours being attributed to every member. Since the category "elderly" encompasses individuals who can be of varying ages, whether 65 or 85, it is clear that attributing the same qualities to individuals between whom there is a generational gap can be entirely misleading. The low social awareness of the problems that ageism causes for older individuals is a consequence of discrimination that exists in many cultures of contemporary society. For this reason, Thornton emphasizes that updating our image of aging and rejecting myths about old age requires a political and philosophical commitment equivalent to that needed to overcome racism and sexism. The language, concepts, and stereotypes that support ageist myths deserve academic attention (Thornton, 2022: 311), but it is also extremely important that this issue is addressed outside the academic community, through influence on social policy and education. The media play a significant role in constructing and reproducing meanings. Therefore, it is essential to pay special attention to how older individuals are reported on, and this can be achieved by reshaping the language used when writing about this social category. This would influence the change of adopted value systems and eliminate negative feelings, such as fear, that aging and older people

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[4] According to the 2011 census by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the proportion of people aged 65 and over was 17.4%. See more: https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2012/Pdf/G201218003.pdf.

evoke. Unlike discrimination based on immutable categories of individuals, such as gender and race, ageism is based on discrimination according to age, which is a category applicable to every living being. This fact underscores the necessity of changing existing attitudes, as "we do not all become black or white, but we all become older" (Butler, 1969: 246).

This study explores how aging and old age are represented in the Serbian press on October 1st, the International Day of Older Persons, and examines the extent of media coverage dedicated to these topics.

Theoretical Framework

Defining Ageism and Age-Based Discrimination

Robert Butler was the first to define age discrimination or ageism, describing it as the prejudice of one age group against other age groups. In his view, ageism reflects the subjective experience that accompanies the concept of the generational gap. It reflects a deep discomfort among younger individuals and middle-aged people—a personal aversion to aging, illness, and disability, as well as a fear of helplessness, "uselessness," and death (Butler, 1969: 243). For over half a century, medical workers, social workers, and psychologists have pointed out the existence of a negative attitude towards the elderly at the individual, institutional, and socio-political levels (Simić, Simić, 2008: 54). The causes of this discriminatory perception arise from several sources, such as a lack of knowledge about the real status of older people, a lack of close interactions with the elderly, or a fear of aging that manifests as a desire to distance oneself from "old age" (Ory et al., 2003: 165).

Ageism is considered, alongside sexism and racism, one of the largest prejudices present in contemporary society. Equating these categories highlights the significance of ageism, and when these three "isms" are imposed on women and men in certain communities, their impact can be devastating (Thornton, 2022: 310). In most cases, ageism is a product and consequence of socialization. Đorđević and his collaborators state that adopting certain attitudes and behaviour models that are considered desirable in a given society can, and often does, lead to the adoption of prejudices towards aging and older individuals. They further emphasize that "the modern value system promotes ideals such as speed, change, strength, success, competition, power, beauty, and health, values that are exclusively associated with youth" (Đorđević et al., 2007: 3). In this sense, although old age is not explicitly mentioned, all of the aforementioned characteristics are the direct opposite of what aging represents, and therefore it necessarily acquires a negative connotation.

Ageism is an extremely complex phenomenon that is often insidious (Gendron et al., 2016: 997). Age-based discrimination is often very difficult to recognize because it is accepted as normal. Many forms of ageism can be easily overlooked because such forms of discrimination are very subtle and ingrained in society; they are not recognized as behaviours and thoughts based on stereotypes and prejudices

about one age group, but rather as a normal relationship between different age groups that do not think well of each other (Milojević, 2021: 120). Ageism, manifested in the form of pervasive negative attitudes towards older individuals, is widely accepted and normative in most cultures (Gendron et al., 2016: 997). In this way, prejudices against older people can be easily spread, reproduced, and transmitted to future generations. Butler notes that cultural attitudes in society only amplify the negative feelings of other age groups toward older individuals. He points out that mandatory retirement removes older individuals from the mainstream of life, and ageism also manifests itself in derogatory remarks about "old fools." Age discrimination is evident in hiring practices, regardless of individual competencies, and is also presumed in inequalities in the allocation of research funding (Butler, 1969: 244).

Age discrimination is also contributed to by the fact that older individuals are perceived as dependent on other social groups, specifically those in middle age. Throughout history, older people have held different statuses depending on social circumstances. In the past, they were respected by younger relatives who, unlike their contemporaries, lived in community with older individuals, sharing living space and resources. The change in this pattern and the early independence of the young have led to older adults often being seen as a "burden." The dependency ratio in economic analyses is based on fixed categories concerning individuals under 15 years old and those over 65. These two categories drive social policy and planning, and adults aged 65 and older are deemed dependent solely because social and economic analysis labels them as such, regardless of their economic productivity or social circumstances (Thornton, 2002: 308). This assertion somewhat demonstrates the view that ageism is a consequence of social constructions and socialization. In this way, changing social and public policy and education to eliminate prejudices can help remove existing stereotypes.

Discrimination against older individuals is also reflected in the area of healthcare. This is discussed by the authors (Đorđević et al., 2007), who note that medications used in the treatment of geriatric patients are not actually recommended for people in that age group. The reason for this is that most pharmaceutical companies do not consider the population over 60 when testing new drugs. The aforementioned authors conclude that the likely reason for this selection of participants is that the inclusion of individuals over 65 would show a higher number of adverse drug effects, and thus the study results would be significantly less favourable. "This is particularly important because these are medications for hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, that is, for diseases that are largely present in older age" (Đorđević et al., 2007: 3).

When discussing ageism and any other form of discrimination, the role of language is undeniable. The starting point for this specific area is provided by Norman Fairclough in his book *Language and Power*. It discusses the connections between language use and unequal power relations—social interactions are analysed in a manner that focuses on their linguistic elements and aims to reveal their generally hidden determinants within the system of social relations as well as the hidden effects they may have on that system (Fairclough, 1988: 1,5). Gendron and others (2016) discuss the language of ageism, emphasizing that language carries

and conveys meanings that perpetuate prejudices that can lead to the development of stereotypes and discrimination. They give the example of how a comment can appear as a compliment (such as addressing an older woman as "young lady") while subtly maintaining the idea that "old" is negative. In this sense, language has power and is essential in understanding discrimination. The language of ageism is complex and can manifest through attitudes that may be perceived as positive (like the aforementioned compliment) to verbal deprecation. Moreover, the person expressing a discriminatory attitude may not be aware that they are causing offense, and simultaneously, the person receiving the message may not be aware of the underlying prejudice (Gendron et al., 2016: 997, 998).

The expression of stereotypes in communication with individuals of a different age can be seen through changes in the way younger individuals address older adults during conversations. This form of communication often originates from individuals who may hold positive attitudes towards aging but still communicate in accordance with negative stereotypes. According to the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), people adjust their communicative behaviour during social interactions (Dragojevic, Gasiorek & Giles, 2015). When addressing older individuals, Nelson identifies two main types of negative communication: over-accommodation and baby talk. In both instances, younger individuals become excessively polite, speak more slowly, and use simple sentences; however, baby talk is deemed more negative and condescending. These forms of communication are based on the stereotype that older individuals have hearing issues and diminished intellect (Nelson, 2005: 209). Such communication implies that older adults are incapable of caring for themselves and are dependent on others, which can negatively affect their social status and self-esteem. This situation further leads older individuals to withdraw into themselves and exclude themselves from social activities, accepting their new role and believing that the assumptions of younger people are correct.

Stereotypes about Older Adults

Existing stereotypes about aging marginalize the lives of older individuals and are inaccurate for the vast majority of them. Many of these prejudices are degrading and based on false images and lies, which are believed to increase the isolation, dependency, and abuse of some older adults (Thornton, 2022: 311). The stereotypes that have persisted through the years can be either positive or negative, but it is a fact that the negative ones are more numerous. Stereotyping is a product of categorizing others, and Nelson states that categories of race, gender, and age are so automatic that they are referred to as "primitive categories." However, he observes that researchers have uncovered a great deal about racism and sexism, but relatively little about age-based prejudices and stereotypes. Age-related prejudices are among the most socially accepted and institutionalized forms of prejudice (Nelson, 2005: 207, 208).

Hummert (1990) identifies the ten most common stereotypes about older people and classifies them into the following categories: Severely Impaired, Shrew/ Curmudgeon, Despondent, Self-centred, Vulnerable, Inflexible Senior Citizen, Recluse,

John Wayne Conservative, Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch, and Perfect Grandparent. Among these stereotypes, the last three are positive (John Wayne Conservative, Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch, and Perfect Grandparent), while the others are negative. This list has been supplemented in subsequent research, which highlights a positive stereotype that describes older individuals as active, healthy, sociable, sexual, and well-informed – individuals in their Golden Age (Golden Agers) (Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, Strahm, 1994).

The first group of negative stereotypes is based on certain features attributed to this social group. A large number of features assigned to older adults are in complete contrast to the desirable features associated with dominant social values, and categorizing older individuals in such ways significantly hinders their functioning in society. In this context, the category of the inflexible senior citizen implies a traditional person who is difficult to change, while the egocentric stereotype refers to a greedy, demanding individual full of prejudice. A recluse is seen as quiet, living in the past, having fixed incomes, and being grateful for any help. Traits attributed to the category of the severely impaired include forgetfulness, slowness in speech and thought; this implies illness and the need for hospital care, as well as dependency on others. Similar traits are ascribed to the vulnerable, which are viewed as hypochondriacs, suspicious of strangers, and fearful of crime. Older individuals are also viewed as despondent. In this sense, they are seen as neglected and useless, lonely and impoverished. The last category classified under negative stereotypes relates to grumpy old individuals who are perceived as bitter and emotionless, those who constantly complain and are easily disturbed.

On the other hand, positive stereotypes are explained through traits that are highly valued on the scale of social values. Thus, the perfect grandparent is a generous person who loves life. They are active, healthy, full of understanding, and supportive of others. The stereotypically portrayed older person as affluent, cautious, and liberal, distinguished by their physical appearance, is characterized as a liberal matriarch/patriarch. The last stereotype known as the John Wayne Conservative describes a vital individual of mild temperament, wise and conservative, who tells stories about the past (Hummert, 1990).

Categorizing older individuals into these ten categories, although rich in various attributed features, is misguided as it overlooks the individual as a person and defines them through specific frames. Although aging has its characteristics conditioned by the natural course of life—just as various biological factors characterize different life stages—such depictions of aging affect all age groups. Likewise, all traits accompanying these stereotypes can be attributed to individuals of any age; they are universal and not bound to a specific social category. Due to such stereotypical views, older individuals can be discriminated against, but they simultaneously create aversion and disdain for aging among younger generations. Nelson (2005), in his exploration of the origins and consequences of stereotypes and prejudices against older individuals, titles his research *Ageism: Prejudice Against Our Feared Future Self.* In this sense, if the period of life that lies ahead for all members of society is viewed as exceptionally negative, and if aging is attributed with the traits previously

highlighted through stereotypes in this chapter, the influence of these stereotypes does not only affect older adults but also impacts all social layers.

Stereotypical Viewing of Older Adults

Stereotypical perceptions of older individuals lead to the emergence of myths about aging, and authors Rowe and Kahn (Rowe & Kahn, 1998; according to Ory et al., 2003) describe six of the most common myths while simultaneously presenting evidence that disproves them:

a) *Being old means being sick* – Although the prevalence of chronic illnesses and disabilities increases with age, a large number of older adults are capable of independently performing the functions necessary for daily life well into old age.

b) *You can't teach an old dog new tricks* – Older individuals are capable of learning new things when it comes to cognitive vitality as well as behavioural changes.

c) *The horse has left the barn* – Adopting recommended lifestyle changes can occur even in later years, such as increasing physical activity.

d) *The secret to successful aging is in wisely choosing one's parents* – The role of genetic factors in longevity and quality of life is relatively small; social factors and lifestyle have a much greater impact.

e) *The light may be on, but the voltage is low* – Although interest in sexual activity declines with age, most older individuals with partners and no significant health problems remain sexually active, although the nature and frequency of such activities may change over time.

f) *The elderlies do not pull their own weight* – Most older adults who are not employed have productive roles within their families or in society (Rowe & Kahn, 1998; according to Ory et al., 2003).

However, the fact that stereotypes are not fixed categories but can change over time is extremely significant in the context of altering discriminatory social practices that marginalize older individuals. Society's effort to improve the status of this social group is necessary to enhance their quality of life. Stereotypes and prejudices result in insufficient contact between different generations and older adults. They base their attitudes and beliefs about aging without direct communication, which could help them understand the real needs of this group. Moreover, the media play a significant role in this process; by choosing topics and methods of reporting, they influence how society perceives reality, producing new and reproducing existing social patterns.

Representing the Elderlies in the Media

Previous research on the representation of older individuals in the media has examined various types of media—traditional and online. In recent years, authors have also explored how this social group is represented on social media, which is becoming increasingly significant in the realms of information and communication. Results show that news, television, film, and advertisements typically contain stereotypes that emphasize the "burden" of aging and frame aging through the lens of

decline and diminished value. The usage of these stereotypes shapes and reinforces societal attitudes and responses to aging, resulting in low expectations for aging that affect all areas of life (UNFPA, 2012). Furthermore, when it comes to the portrayal of older adults in the media, authors emphasize that they are underrepresented relative to their share of the population (Kessler, Rakoczy, Staudinger, 2004; Ylänne, 2015; Prieler, Kohlbacher, Hagiwara, Arima, 2015).

The degree of representation of older adults in the media differs by gender. Women are particularly affected, as they can be seen as a more discriminated group on this basis. Additionally, the degree of representation is directly associated with age—older individuals are less represented in the media (Kessler et al., 2004: 354). This media practice significantly influences how the marginalized group is perceived by society, and the choice of actors in the media plays a role in determining who has the right to participate in public debate. Thus, insufficient representation hinders discussions about the needs of marginalized groups (Jürgens, Meltzer, Scharkow, 2022).

In representing any social group, the roles in which its members are depicted are equally important. When older adults appear in the media, especially in advertisements, they are not represented as "human beings" but rather appear for a specific purpose. This purpose is usually to support the qualities, roles, or products associated with age (Ylänne, 2015). Furthermore, the visual representation of marginalized groups is extremely important, considering that visual news has unique properties compared to other reporting methods, making it a more effective and influential bearer of meaning (Joffe, 2008). Images of older adults are particularly important in providing visibility to this historically marginalized topic, and a study by Thompson and his collaborators focused on the visual representations of elderly care showed that this subject is often represented in a decontextualized, trivial, and unrepresentative manner (Thompson et al., 2022).

However, certain contemporary authors in their research come to conclusions indicating a change in media practices regarding the portrayal of aging. Although older adults are still underrepresented in the media relative to their demographic percentage, they appear more frequently and are depicted in more acceptable ways compared to data from previous decades (Prieler et al., 2015). The exclusively negative portrayal of older individuals is changing (Uotila, Lumme-Sandt, Saarenheimo, 2010). Investigating how the Finnish press represents older adults, Uotila and his colleagues conclude that, in addition to traditional images of aging—viewed either as a time of weakness and loss or as a time of wisdom and experience—there exists a third, new stream. This new image represents successful aging, attributing qualities such as continuous activity and timelessness. Despite the changes in exclusively negative depictions of older adults in the media, patterns still exist in which they are represented negatively—where aging is associated with attributes of loneliness and illness, completely excluding the possibility that frail and sick older individuals can be socially active (Uotila et al., 2010: 121).

Xu (2020) examines the content on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, about older people, which has become important for understanding media representations of older individuals. The study explores how Swedish authorities visually depict older adults on Facebook compared to other age groups, showing that

the representation is not diverse: older individuals, including those in nursing homes, are predominantly portrayed as socially engaged and moderately physically active, which does not align with the prevailing negative stereotypes about older people. Additionally, this study argues that older individuals are depicted as inferior to younger people in terms of physical and technological competence (Xu, 2020: 719).

Nevertheless, the majority of authors in our region primarily report a negative representation of older people, as well as their inadequate presence in the media. Authors Perišin and Kufin, in their research, focus on ageism in the informative programs of Croatian television. They conclude that older individuals are relatively rarely depicted, and particularly rarely as active or socially recognized (Perišin & Kufin, 2009: 30). In the context of the media and public sphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, research shows that older individuals are marginalized in two ways: through the exclusion of this population from reporting and the public sphere in general, and by minimizing their significance in society by reducing reports about older individuals to trivial and socially unimportant topics (Baraković & Mahmutović, 2018: 31). Regarding research in Serbia, authors Simeunović Bajić and Manić (2015) conclude that Serbian media do not sufficiently address the issues of older adults, aging, and age. Older individuals remain almost invisible, and when they are visible, they are often portrayed stereotypically alongside numerous prejudices about their inferiority, passivity, and undesirability (Simeunović Bajić & Manić, 2015: 101).

The common conclusion of most studies is that older individuals are underrepresented in the media and are most often depicted through negative imagery. Such media practices marginalize and isolate individuals who belong to this social group, who are already excluded from many social activities due to their age. Therefore, changes are necessary in the realm of information; more media space is required to promote aging and to adopt a culture of aging through media literacy for the public (Zovko & Vukobratović, 2017: 121).

Methodological Framework

The subject of this work is to examine how the theme of aging and age is represented, as well as how older individuals are depicted in the Serbian press on October 1st, when the International Day of Older Persons is observed. The goal of the research is to determine how much media space these media outlets dedicate to reporting on older people, aging, and age. Additionally, the aim is to ascertain whether these topics are reported in a stereotypical manner and which stereotypes are most prevalent. Through quantitative and qualitative content analysis, we have attempted to establish in which sections the mentioned topics most commonly appear, whether the articles are accompanied by photographs, and what significance is attributed to these articles considering the page number on which they appear. We also examined the typical length of articles and the genres journalists use when writing about these topics, as well as the authors' value judgments.

The analysis includes four daily newspapers circulating in Serbia—*Politika, Danas*, *Večernje novosti*, and *Blic*. This selection was made because these newspapers

have different editorial policies: *Politika* and *Danas* are categorized as serious news publications, while *Večernje novosti* and *Blic* are considered semi-tabloids. The issues of these newspapers, along with their special supplements, published on October 1st in the years 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, were analysed. The choice of years is based on the aim to cover a recent period, with an emphasis on possible changes in media reporting on issues related to older adults over the past few years. The choice of October 1st as the focal point for analysis is directed towards the observance of the International Day of Older Persons, which represents a key opportunity for media coverage on aging issues, the social challenges faced by older adults, and the institutional responsibilities of society towards this population.

The International Day of Older Persons is celebrated every year on October 1. It was first celebrated in 1991, following the United Nations General Assembly's proclamation on September 14, 1990, to declare this day as the International Day of Older Persons, as stated in Resolution 46/106 (Zungu, 2022). International days provide opportunities for the broader public to be educated about significant issues, to mobilize political will and resources to tackle global problems (UN[5]). In this sense, the International Day of Older Persons aims to focus public attention on the status and problems faced by older adults, ensuring that development for all age groups and dignified aging are facilitated.

To improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live, last year saw the launch of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030). This involves global cooperation that brings together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, the academic community, media, and the private sector—all with the understanding that older adults often lack access to even basic resources necessary for a dignified life and face multiple barriers that prevent their full participation in society (World Health Organization).

The unit of analysis in this research consists of newspaper articles that explicitly mention age, the years of individuals, or in which the context clearly indicates that the journalist is writing about an older person. Texts in which age is not mentioned (e.g., articles about famous personalities who are older but without mentioning their age) are not included in the analysis, as they are not directly related to the topic of aging. The research corpus includes all articles published in the newspapers during the specified period that pertain to aging, the lives and problems of older individuals, and the International Day of Older Persons.

Results and Discussion

During the analysed period, a total of 1,639 articles were published in *Danas, Politika, Blic*, and *Večernje novosti*. Out of these, 66 articles relate to the themes of aging, older individuals, and the International Day of Older Persons, which constitutes 4.03% of the total content. Additionally, the largest number of articles (40) appeared

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[5] For more information, see: https://www.un.org/en/UN-system/ageing (Accessed March 3, 2025)

in special supplements bearing the same title—*Treće doba* (Third Age), published by Danas (27, 6.64% of Danas' total) and *Večernje novosti* (13, 2.49% of Večernje novosti's total). Considering that October 1st was specifically chosen to mark the International Day of Older Persons with the aim of directing public attention to the problems faced by older individuals, we conclude that this topic is not sufficiently represented in either serious print media or semi-tabloids, and that the issues of older individuals are marginalized.

Out of the total number of articles, *Politika* published 437 articles, *Danas* 407, *Blic* 272, and *Večernje novosti* 523. The largest number of articles pertaining to the themes covered in this research was published in *Danas* (31 articles, 7.62%) and Večernje novosti (21 articles, 4.01% of total), while significantly fewer articles were noted in *Politika* (10 articles, 2.29% of total) and Blic (4 articles, 1.47% of total) (Table 1).

Table 1: *Newspaper Coverage of Aging Topics*

Newspaper	Total Articles	Articles on Aging
Danas	407	31 (7.62% of total)
Politika	437	10 (2.29% of total)
Blic	272	4 (1.47% of total)
Večernje novosti	523	21 (4.01% of total)

The Graph 1 illustrates the distribution of articles on aging and old age across four daily newspapers. *Danas* accounts for the largest share with 47% of all identified articles, followed by *Večernje novosti* with 32%. *Politika* contributed 15% of the articles on this topic, while *Blic* had the smallest share, with only 6%. These percentages reflect the extent to which each newspaper engaged with the themes of aging and old age within the analyzed sample.

Graph 1: *Distribution of Articles on Aging and Old Age by Newspaper*
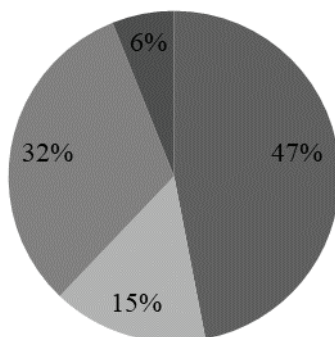
Thus, 62% of the articles were published in serious informative media, while in the semi-tabloids, this percentage was almost half, amounting to 38%. Based on the statistics, we can conclude that serious informative media pay more attention to the problems of older individuals; however, the semi-tabloid *Večernje novosti* published a significantly higher number of articles on these topics compared to the serious informative newspaper *Politika.* In this regard, the newspapers Danas and *Večernje novosti* published the largest number of articles. The fact that these editorial teams are attentive to these issues is illustrated by the fact that both newspapers published the supplement *Treće doba* on October 1st, with Danas publishing it in 2019, 2020, and 2021, while *Večernje novosti* featured it only in 2019. It is important to note that the articles published in *Večernje novosti* (outside of the supplement) are exclusively very short or of medium length, whereas *Politika* has a larger number of long articles.

The analysis of media reporting on the topics of old age and aging shows a tendency to decrease the number of published texts during the observed period. The largest number of texts on this topic was recorded in 2019 (43.94%). During 2020, the number of published texts almost doubled - a total of 21.21% were published. The same values were recorded in 2021, while in 2022 the number of published texts dropped to 7.58%. This downward trend continued in the following years, and only 2 texts (3.03%) were published in 2023, while a slight increase to 4 texts (6.06%) was recorded in 2024. These data indicate a declining media interest in issues of age and aging during the analysed period. In addition, in the analysed period, a gradual abolition of special allowances on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons was observed. One of the possible reasons for the decrease in media attention to the topics of age and aging may be the increased focus of the media on reporting on the epidemiological situation caused by the Covid-19 virus. Although the elderly were among the most vulnerable groups during the pandemic, the number of published texts on this topic did not increase even in the post-pandemic period, which may indicate a long-term decline in media interest in this population.

 Given that the texts published in the special supplements differ from the texts on the pages of the regular edition, they will first be analysed separately. When it comes to texts that were published outside of special supplements (25), the largest number belongs to the section *Društvo (Society)* (44%), followed by *Hronika (Crime section)* (16%), while four texts (16%) were published in the section *Belgrade*. One text each was recorded in the sections *Politika, Ljudi, Aktuelno, Beogradska hronika, Ekonomija and Globus (Politics, People, Latest, Belgrade Chronicle, Economy and Globe).*

Texts published in the *Society* column predominantly deal with the International Day of the Elderly, where they most often rely on statistical data and official statements about the need to adapt society to demographic changes and the growing number of elderly people. However, they lack a deeper analysis of the problems faced by the elderly population. In the dailies *Blic* and *Večernje novosti*, a sensationalist way of reporting on the elderly is noticeable, with these articles predominantly placed in the Crime section. The newspaper *Blic* only publishes information about the

celebration of the International Day of the Elderly in the 2023 issue, while the other articles published in the analysed period place the elderly in the context of victims. Also, the authors of the texts refer to elderly female members as "grandmothers", thus approaching the aforementioned negative types of communication (excessive kindness) and implying the dependence of elderly persons (Nelson, 2005).

The distribution of texts about elderly people in the analysed daily newspapers indicates their limited importance within the editorial policy. Most of the texts were published in the central part of the newspaper (pages 8–17), while they were absent from the cover and front pages, which suggests that this topic is not given a high priority. This distribution may indicate that age and aging are primarily treated as social issues, rather than as political or economic topics of wider public interest. Given that readers pay the most attention to the cover and front pages, this positioning may contribute to a lower visibility and impact of topics related to the elderly.

Short texts dominated the analysed sample, considering that there were the most of them (56%), while the number of medium-length texts was 5 (20%), and long texts 6 (24%). Almost all texts are signed, and the value attitude of the author is mostly neutral. Media content related to the elderly and the topic of aging was mostly packaged as news (48%) or reports (40%), while only 3 articles (12%) were observed. Long texts of analytical genres are not present in media practice when it comes to reporting on this topic, while a more complex approach is necessary for topics that require raising social awareness and adjusting living conditions for all citizens. These facts lead to the conclusion that the elderly receive limited media space and are marginalized. This is supported by the fact that, in the majority of cases, elderly people are the subject of reports, often appearing in sensationalist texts in which they are portrayed as victims of violence. For example, headlines such as *They were hitting and throwing me for 3000 dinars* (*Večernje novosti*, October 1, 2019) and *The Prosecution is investigating who beat the grandmother* (*Blic*, October 1, 2019) illustrate this tendency. On the other hand, content in which the elderly person appears as a subject was observed in *Politika*, where the approach to the topic is professional and responsible, giving a voice to older individuals. For example, headlines such as *The pandemic changed the view of old age* (*Politika*, October 1, 2020) and *Cheerful spirit and dedicated work – the secret of longevity by Jovanka Videnović* (*Politika*, October 1, 2024) illustrate this approach. Despite the fact that the analysed press was published on October 1st, there are still texts that portray elderly people stereotypically and place them in the context of victims (through stereotypes of *severely damaged, depressed, vulnerable*), which is why this practice indicates an insufficiently professional approach to such topics.

Photo 1: Elderly men in public space, almost turned away, portrayed without active roles - *Večernje novosti*, October 1, 2023, Page 7

Photo 2: Older men depicted passively, reinforcing invisibility - *Večernje novosti*, October 1, 2024, Page 7

The visual representation of aging and the elderly is equally important, and most of the texts (68%) are accompanied by a photo. However, the way this group is visually depicted can be characterized as stereotypical. The pattern of photos depicting the elderly does not differ in the semi-tabloids and the serious news press, with the fact that in 2019 both semi-tabloids featured a photo of an injured elderly woman with facial bruising. The dominant images of the elderly are photos in which individuals are not active, and photos in which their backs are turned stand out in particular (Photo 1, Photo 2). They refer to the loneliness and isolation of the elderly, and their faces are not visible, which suggests their invisibility in society and reproduces existing stereotypes. Despite the fact that the number of years implies certain risks, it is necessary for the elderly to be represented in other aspects of life in which they have active roles.

On the other hand, the eponymous special supplement of the *Third Age*, published by *Danas* and *Večernje novosti*, represents a more significant example of journalistic practice in reporting on aging and the elderly, although there are differences in their approaches. The daily newspaper *Danas* printed this supplement in 2019, with 10 published texts, in 2020 with 11 texts, and in 2021 with 6 texts. Various topics are covered, and the tone of the texts can be interpreted as critically directed towards society, which has the responsibility to react and improve living conditions so that all its members have the opportunity for a dignified life. This is reflected in articles such as *Through intergenerational appreciation, we must show how mature we are as a society* (*Danas*, October 1, 2019), *Employees in social care are forgotten, the system is neglected* (*Danas*, October 1, 2020), and *The media sporadically follows topics about older people, there are no critical texts* (*Danas*, October 1, 2020). With this way of reporting, the responsibility for the maladjustment of the elderly and their isolation is justifiably attributed to society, thereby empowering the elderly. In addition, the elderly individuals are not stereotypically represented as inactive,

depressed and sick, but are shown in roles in which they contribute to society and are physically active within certain limits. This is illustrated by articles such as *Half a century of volunteering by Danica Šmić (Danas,* October 1, 2020), *Nordic walking increasingly popular, age is no obstacle (Danas,* October 1, 2020), and *How old crafts and craftsmen survive in the modern world (Danas*, October 1, 2021). In the Third Age, unlike the texts published in the same issues and outside the supplement, the interview appears as a genre (Danas, October 1, 2020: *Branka Petrić: I found great freedom in the third age*; Danas, October 1, 2021: *CORAX: The characters are getting worse and worse, there is still a lot of work for me*). This fact is highly positive because older people appear as subjects who talk about themselves and their age. The direct visibility of members of marginalized groups is extremely important in the context of improving the position of the entire group.

The supplement of the same name was printed in *Večernje novosti* only in 2019. The texts (70%) published in the supplement are long and the authors are well-known, which is common to the supplements of both newspapers that publish them. However, what is noticeable is the use of positive and negative stereotypes in reporting. This fact is illustrated by the title *Grandparents Love, Parents Care* (*Večernje novosti*, 2019) which supports the stereotype of *the perfect grandparent*. The texts with the titles *Work comes before father and mother* (*Večernje novosti*, 2019) and *How to make two dinars out of one* (*Večernje novosti*, 2019) indicate the isolation and loneliness of the elderly, which illustrates the following stereotypes - *solitary, vulnerable, depressed*. In addition, sensationalism is also noticeable in the headline *150 people in Serbia older than 100* (*Večernje novosti*, 2019). Although *Večernje novosti* dedicated a lot of its space to the topics of aging and old age compared to other analysed newspapers, its approach can be characterized as stereotypical. Given that stereotypical attitudes can cause discrimination, it is necessary for the media image of the elderly to be non-stereotypical.

Conclusion

The media are the basic tool for disseminating information and their task is to provide their users with information necessary for orientation and decision-making in everyday life. Media images shape the social, political, economic and cultural environment and these images influence citizens to determine which topics are relevant. In this sense, the media create a context within which age and aging are understood.

In the analysed media, the elderly individuals are marginalized. In this way, this social group is excluded from the public space, and the stereotypes that cause isolation are maintained and reproduced. Having in mind that one of the roles of the media is to point the citizens' attention to problems and suggest a democratic society, it is necessary that they approach these topics professionally. The results of the research showed that the serious informative press gave more space to the topics that are the subject of the work, while in the case of semi-tabloids, in addition to insufficient representation, sensationalist and unethical reporting is also present. The

most prevalent were the negative stereotypes that Hummert (1994) categorizes as *severely damaged, vulnerable, lonely and depressed,* and the positive stereotype of the *perfect grandfather/grandmother* was also noted. Especially significant are the special supplements that indicate that the importance of a professional approach has been recognized in the editing.

It is important to emphasize that the corpus of research included numbers published on the first of October, when the International Day of the Older Persons is celebrated, and it is necessary to examine to what extent these topics are represented and how they are approached under normal conditions.

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Predstavljanje starosti i starenja u srpskoj štampi

Jovana Trajković, Istraživač saradnik, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Demografski podaci jasno pokazuju da će na svetu starijih ljudi biti više nego ikada u ljudskoj istoriji. Uprkos tome, negativni stavovi i stereotipi prema njima su i dalje prisutni. Starost je društveno-istorijska i kulturološka kategorija i nosi ona značenja koje joj društvo pripisuje. Zbog toga je uloga medija u stvaranju i reporodukovanju slike starijih veoma značajna. Predmet ovog rada je ispitati na koji je način predstavljena tema starosti i starenja, kao i to kako su prikazane starije osobe u srpskoj štampi prvog oktobra kada se obeležava Međunarodni dan starijih osoba. Pored toga, cilj rada je utvrditi koliko medijskog prostora srpska štampa koristi kako bi izveštavala o starijim osobama, starosti i starenju. Analiza obuhvata četiri dnevna lista koja izlaze na teritoriji Srbije – ozbiljnu informativnu štampu *Politiku* i *Danas*, kao i polutabloide *Večerenje novosti* i *Blic*. Analizirani su brojevi i njihovi specijani dodaci koji su izašli prvog oktobra od 2019. do 2024. godine. Rezultati pokazuju da su teme starenja i starosti marginalizovane i dok je izveštavanje ozbiljne informativne štampe uglavnom profesionalno, u polutabloidima je prisutan senzacionalistički pristup.

Ključne reči: mediji, reprezentacija, ejdžizam, stereotipi, Međunarodni dan starijih osoba

Beyond Hashtag Activism: Exploring Cancel Culture on Social Media[1]

Marija Đurđević[2][3], English Lecturer, Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract

Cancel culture is a new phenomenon which refers to online public shaming based on perceived moral transgressions of a well-known or anonymous individual that can result in their social expulsion from the public sphere, professional circles or community. This contemporary form of ostracism typically bypasses traditional institutions showing the power of social media to influence public opinion and pass judgement. Cancel culture is thought to have originated from the #MeToo movement, an online campaign led on social media against sexual harassment. The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, we shall try to demonstrate the importance of social movements such as #MeToo due to their power to break the infamous spiral of silence. Secondly, our objective is also to explore cancel culture that arises as a consequence of social media activism as well as certain alternatives to it that have emerged recently.

Keywords: cancel culture, #MeToo, online activism, spiral of silence, public shaming

Beyond Hashtag Activism: Exploring Cancel Culture on Social Media

Introduction

Cancel or call-out culture is a relatively new expression whose origins can be traced back to social media and their mass popularity in recent years. The practice it refers to, however, is by no means a novelty in western civilization – ostracism has been present in western culture since ancient times, the only difference now is its online dimension. It is generally assumed that cancel culture originated from the #MeToo movement, an online campaign and social movement directed against sexual abuse and harassment culture whose victims have been mostly women.

As cultural phenomena, cancel culture and #MeToo are interesting firstly from the perspective of public opinion, since they demonstrate how shifts in the climate of opinion occur for or against a party or a person, and secondly from the perspective

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[2] Corresponding author: mdjurdjevic@tmf.bg.ac.rs

[3] ORCID: 0000-0003-0019-1452

of the spiral of silence, seeing that they show the ways in which the infamous spiral forms and reverses its course.

In this paper our main theoretical perspective will be that of Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann who proposed and argued for the understanding of public opinion as an instrument of social control. Having tested her hypotheses in theory as well as in practice, she formulated the spiral of silence thesis which explains how the majority point of view prevails in society and why most people opt to keep quiet if they disagree with it.

Bearing in mind the startling speed at which cancel culture is spreading worldwide and its consequences for offline reality, we believe placing it in the context of the spiral of silence can deepen the understanding of its origins and evolution, but also show the direction in which it is headed. Finally, by demonstrating the circular nature of the spiral of silence, in this paper we strive to offer critical perspectives on both phenomena, but also to discuss possible alternatives to cancel culture that have emerged recently.

Public Opinion as Social Control

The concept of public opinion has been present in western culture since antiquity, e.g. it is mentioned in Biblical stories, Homer, Cicero, Plato and Aristotle. However, despite its long history[4] and countless attempts by scholars, jurists, political theorists and journalists to explain and define it, this term has eschewed their endeavors and it remains to this day without a clear, systematic and comprehensive definition (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 58). According to Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, a German political scientist and a public opinion researcher, numerous interpretations and definitions of public opinion stem from two distinct perceptions of this concept throughout the ages: public opinion as rationality and public opinion as social control.

To begin with, the understanding of public opinion as rationality and opinion formation as a rational process implies "the conscious acquisition of knowledge by the means of reason and the making of logical and rationally sound judgements based on that knowledge" and tends to narrow down the content of public opinion to political matters (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 221-222). This view of public opinion thus indicates that all citizens are well-informed, able to form shrewd judgements and put forward sound arguments, which is rather idealistic meaning that public opinion actually remains restricted to a limited group of citizens who fulfil the mentioned criteria.

One of the main issues with the rational concept of public opinion, according to Noelle-Neumann (1993: 227), is that it "does not explain the pressure that public opinion must exert if it is to have any influence on the government and the citizens." But, when viewed as a form of social control, the power of public opinion becomes evident since in this context it refers to the approval or disapproval of the public,

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[4] Beginning with the traditional works of antiquity, this concept has evolved over time and can be found in the works of Machiavelli, Montaigne, John Locke, David Hume, Rousseau, Alexis de Tocqueville, to mention but a few, as well as in numerous modern theories (Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

i.e. to attitudes and modes of behavior people exhibit in a certain place at a specific time. What is more, in this view public opinion is firstly not limited to only some subject matters of political importance, but open to all, and secondly, it "is not just a matter for those who feel a calling, or for talented critics […]. Everyone is involved" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 64). However, public opinion understood this way "is not concerned with the quality of the arguments" i.e. with what is right or wrong, but rather with the strength of opposing camps and their readiness to make use of isolation and exclusion as a means of social control, as we shall demonstrate on the following pages (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 228).

Noelle-Neumann maintains that the concept of public opinion tends to be more effective when viewed as an instrument of social control than as *raisonnement* in the public sphere.[5] Our analysis of the #MeToo and cancel culture phenomena in the context of Noelle-Neumann's theory aims to corroborate the validity of this view and to demonstrate that public opinion seen as a form of social control represents a powerful mechanism in today's era of mass media and social networking sites.

Noelle-Naumann's understanding of the concept of public opinion has developed directly out of her theory named the spiral of silence.

The Spiral of Silence

When Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory was introduced at the 1972 International Congress of Psychology in Tokyo (the book was published in 1980 in German and in 1984 in English), it was a unique and, until then, the only theory to thoroughly investigate and incorporate various aspects of public opinion as a form of social control as well as the effects of the mass media upon both the formation of public opinion and its perception and reception, with the aim of explicating the workings of the infamous spiral, i.e. why individuals opt to remain silent instead of expressing their opinions when they differ from the prevailing ones. Denis McQuail has noticed that Noelle-Neumann named her theory *the spiral of silence* "because the underlying logic holds that the more a dominant version of the opinion consensus is disseminated by mass media in society, the more will contrary individual voices remain silent, thus accelerating the media effect – hence a 'spiraling' process" (McQuail, 1983: 202).

According to Noelle-Neumann (1993: ix), it is precisely our social nature that forces us to comply. Namely, people fear isolation, which is why they constantly observe their environment, the climate of opinion and changing trends, "they register which opinions are gaining ground and which will become dominant" and shape their views accordingly. Noelle-Neumann goes so far as to claim, not without foundation,[6] that people have an innate, intuitive ability to perceive predominant opinions in their

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[5] For a more detailed insight into the arguments in favor of this claim, see Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 220-234.

[6] She relies on the surveys done at the Allensbach Institute in Germany, where she was employed, as well as on some theoretical works on human nature from the fields of mass psychology, biology and evolution.

surroundings and to adjust – "people in fact do adapt their behavior to the apparent strength or weakness of the various camps" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 16). The author acknowledges that the factors such as age, sex, education, occupation, social status or place of residence, together with the feeling of being in harmony with the spirit of the times, can to a certain extent influence the willingness to speak out.[7] As a rule, "[i]n every population subgroup the supporters of the dominant opinion are more willing to voice their view than those in the minority" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 29).

The question arises, however, relating to the cause of keeping quiet, of not speaking up – is the fear of social isolation strong enough a motive, can it corroborate the spiral of silence theory?

Relying on the one hand on theoretical grounds and on the other on experimental findings, Noelle-Neumann claims that our social nature "causes us to fear separation and isolation from our fellows and to want to be respected and liked by them" (1993: 41), adding that "most people will join the majority point of view even when they have no doubt that it is false" so as to avoid being rejected or despised or standing alone (1993: 38). Furthermore, the author maintains that social isolation can turn out rather perilous for the individual when it comes to issues that are controversial or undergoing change (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 56-57). Consequently, it could be said that the fear of isolation acts as an integrative factor of society, i.e. an effective means of social control pressuring "outsiders" to conform and keeping "peace breakers" in check. "The existing order is preserved on the one hand by the individual's fear of isolation and his need to be accepted; and on the other by the public's demand, carrying the weight of a court sentence, that we conform to established opinions and behaviors" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 63). But, can outsiders – "those who do not fear isolation or are willing to pay its price" – alter predominant views (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 139)?

These "deviants", these fearless "heretics", these avant-garde reformers ahead of their time, such as artists, scientists, thinkers or scholars, to name but a few, are the ones who pave the way for a better future, according to Noelle-Neumann. "The concept of the spiral of silence reserves the possibility of changing society to those who either know no fear of isolation or have overcome it," while it is understood as a matter of course that the courageous ones make up a relatively small percentage of the population (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 139).

But the question is what happens with those greater in number, the cautious ones who prefer silence? Noelle-Neumann claims that, within the framework of the spiral of silence, silence is crucial since it tends to be interpreted mostly as – agreement, and adds that "much of the power of public opinion derives from the fearful silence of many individuals" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 196).

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[7] For example, men are more willing to express their opinion than women, younger people than older ones, high-ranking officials than low-ranking ones etc. (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 24-28).

How a Hashtag Debunked Hollywood: The Case of the #MeToo Campaign

Denis McQuail in his *Mass Communication Theory* gives a general outline of campaigns (conducted in real-life conditions, not online, but the same framework applies in both cases, as we shall see) stating that "they are often concerned with directing, reinforcing and activating existing tendencies towards socially-approved objectives" as well as that they "work ultimately through the individuals who receive and respond to messages" (McQuail, 1983: 190). The source of a campaign usually occupies a high position in society and distributes messages through different media so as to reach the chosen public; "the success of a campaign depends to some extent on its message being interpreted in the same way as intended," meaning that a campaign can easily go wrong or boomerang and that its effect can be diverse and unintended, especially if we bear in mind that messages are noticed and then accepted or rejected on the basis of group allegiance (McQuail, 1983: 191).

Digital activism as we know it today has come to be associated mainly with social media platforms and hashtag movements. According to Ng (2022: 41), its origins are to be found in multiple forms of online activities that began as early as Web 1.0. such as spreading information using specific websites, email lists or message boards, online petitions etc. It has been argued, however, that "online activism was most effective when combined with more traditional, offline activities" (Ng, 2022: 41).

For the present analysis, it is important to begin with the fact that the #MeToo campaign had unfolded primarily in the electronic context before its impact started extending beyond the online domain and that its effectiveness was first and foremost based on the hype surrounding the hashtag in question which reached a considerable number of people, many of whom were well-known and influential. "For those who would use electronic media to foster change," claims Jones (2002: 85), "their potential seems great. Because these media more easily transcend space, class, and cultural constraints, organizers can 'broadcast' to many."

On their official website (https://metoomvmt.org/), it is stated that the #MeToo campaign began as early as 2006 when the activist Tarana Burke founded the movement so as to help mainly women of color and lower social standing who were victims of sexual violence find their way to recovery. But the movement became a global phenomenon only in October 2017 when it went viral owing to the actress Alyssa Milano who invited her followers on Twitter to respond to her post if they were also victims of sexual molestation. As a New York Times article from that period reports, "Tens of thousands of people replied to the message. Some just wrote 'me too,' while many others described their personal experience of harassment or assault" (Codrea-Rado, 2017). Harvey Weinstein's name was the first on the hit list which soon grew to include many other high-profile men from the film and entertainment industry as well as politics, all of whom were accused of some sort of sexual misconduct, ranging from minor provocations to rape.

This way an avalanche was triggered which actually initiated the break in a wall of silence surrounding the issue in question. Many activists, stars, VIPs and

famous people from show business and public life stepped forward confessing to having been victims of sexual abuse and demanding that those responsible suffer the consequences of their acts. This prompted ordinary people to start sharing their personal stories as well and to call on the authorities to take action and punish wrongdoers appropriately, regardless of their high positions and in spite of them. As a consequence, a substantial number of men held accountable stepped down and withdrew from the industry, some admitted to their misdemeanors and offered official apologizes, many were publicly exposed and then forced to resign their posts. Additionally, lawsuits were filed and the general public along with those in power intervened so as to prevent such events from happening again in the future as well as to alleviate the suffering of the ones who dared to speak up by showing support and understanding. Time Magazine named the silence breakers their person of the year 2017 (Zacharek & Dockterman, 2017).

On January 1, 2018, a couple of months after the #MeToo campaign began, another initiative was launched called Time's Up, spearheaded by prominent Hollywood celebrities, intended to tackle the problem of sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace, advocating gender parity at all levels and fostering social change. Following the launching of the movement, a legal defense fund was established with the aim of covering the expenses of legal proceedings and providing legal assistance to victims of sexual abuse who could not afford it, regardless of their gender (Buckley, 2018).

Having thus stepped out of the virtual into the real world, the movement raised public awareness and changed the climate of opinion creating conditions in which it became acceptable to speak about the topics such as the aforementioned; victims started feeling empowered and secure to expose themselves and more willing to take risks including public disgrace, the loss of reputation or even a job. Owing to the campaign and its influence, some positive improvements have taken place in the lives of women (and men) around the globe. On the other hand, it is also true that the #MeToo initiative ignited a public debate and opened up some thought-provoking questions from the point of view of the spiral of silence theory.

The Spiraling Process in Reverse

Seeing that the spiraling process tends to establish one view as dominant, equating thus the majority opinion with the status quo, all other opinions are consequently labeled as unacceptable, which is why their supporters are less likely to voice them. This process is dynamic and thanks to certain daring individuals, but primarily to the mass media and nowadays social networking sites, can more easily and quickly than in the past change the climate of opinion. People thus tend to either express their views or stay quiet waiting for the shift in the spiraling process. Interestingly, "when a swing in the climate occurs for or against a party, a person, or a particular idea, it seems to be sensed everywhere at almost exactly the same time, by all population groups, all age groups, all occupational groups" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 19). What is more, "[w]hen people feel that they are in the minority, they

become cautious and silent, thus reinforcing the impression of weakness, until the apparently weaker side disappears completely except for a hard core that holds on to its previous values, or until the opinion becomes taboo" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 202).

So, the #MeToo campaign is not only a clear illustration of the spiraling process and its disruption, as previously shown, but it also demonstrates how this phenomenon can reverse its course. Highly controversial as it already is, this topic requires some additional consideration from a different perspective, whereas it goes without saying that movements such as this are indispensable nowadays and that perpetrators are by no means to be understood nor their deeds forgotten. But, as Katty Kay says in her article for BBC News from that period, "what initially seemed such a simple case of black and white, actually has shades of confusing grey" (Kay, 2017). By this she actually refers to all the ways in which the campaign could (and did) backfire on its activists and supporters. For example, fake accusations have discredited the real ones; the effect on men has at times been counterproductive since some of them started avoiding doing business with women or avoiding them altogether for fear that their actions would be interpreted as inappropriate; there is also a constant danger of a witch-hunt being launched against men for no better reason than being men, and women thus branded witches; furthermore, should any harmless flirtation be immediately interpreted as sexual harassment, and should consequently the category of consent be revisited (Kay, 2017)? All this does not help remove the stigma attached to the problem and it only alienates men instead of encouraging them to get involved and take action.

The spiraling process has undeniably reversed its course as it has become undesirable to say anything remotely unfavorable about the #MeToo or any similar movement. One of the consequences of this shift in public opinion is the rise and expansion of cancel culture both on social media and in real life.

Cancel Culture on Social Media

According to Eve Ng, the author of one of the first critical studies on cancel culture, the term *cancel culture* encompasses *cancel practices* or *cancelling* aimed at a *cancel target* (an individual, brand or company) and *cancel discourses*, i.e. comments and discussion related to cancelling (Ng, 2022: 1). Even though cancelling typically commences on social media platforms, e.g. followers are invited to cancel certain individuals by unfollowing them, its repercussions tend to surpass the online realm resulting in boycotting brands, products, music or films/TV series associated with the target; furthermore, TV networks often choose to terminate contracts with such celebrities or celebrities may end collaborations with brands or companies whose activities are viewed as problematic (Ng, 2022: 5). Clark (2020: 88) succinctly explains this practice as "an expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one's attention from someone or something whose values, (in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money." It is also worth mentioning that even though cancelling mostly involves celebrities

and public figures, "ordinary" people can as well be cancelled should their behaviors or views be seen as problematic.

Ng (2022: 15) explains that the origins of cancel culture follow multiple trajectories.[8] In this paper we have chosen to focus on one of them – social media activism, particularly the hashtag movement #MeToo. The reasons underlying our decision are twofold. Firstly, we are of the opinion that the other mentioned sources of cancel culture, though undoubtedly led to its inception and rise, are limited in their scope of influence and specific in their reasons for cancelling, unlike the #MeToo movement which has had a global reach and impact and rather universal grounds for initiating action. In this regard, the effects of #MeToo have been more profound and far-reaching. Secondly, in this paper our aim is to show the existence of a close connection between the two phenomena – #MeToo and cancel culture – from yet another perspective, that of the spiral of silence theory. In other words, our intent is to demonstrate that they represent two sides of the same coin.

The main purpose of cancel culture relates directly to its origins, namely hashtag activism, and could be defined as demanding accountability for actions that go unpunished or have not been adequately addressed through traditional institutions, but are perceived as objectionable and deserving punishment, which in this case comes in the form of online ostracism. Exerting social pressure this way can result in the expulsion of cancel targets from the public sphere and social or professional circles, which can lead to the destruction of their careers. Cancelling thus shows the power of social media to shape public opinion and pass judgement outside (or even despite) traditional channels of redress.

But the efficacy of cancelling seems to be a point of contention. According to both Ross (2025) and Clark (2020), cancelling can be effective and justified as a last resort when the targets are powerful, privileged people, otherwise beyond reach of justice. However, in case of an influential cancel target, cancelling more often than not leads only to a temporary loss of followers, sponsorships and contracts, with many celebrities being cancelled multiple times without any long-term nor adverse consequences for their reputation or careers (Ng, 2022: 60). For example, after J. K. Rowling was cancelled due to her transphobic views, she still had more than 14 million followers on Twitter (and thus considerable power and influence) (Janssens & Spreeuwenberg, 2022: 105-106). Cancelling can also have the opposite effect and generate publicity for the target despite negative comments. On the other hand, when a cancel target is a regular individual who does not possess financial resources to withstand a loss of job or reputation, the question arises regarding the legitimacy, justification and proportionality of the punishment. Seeing that cancel culture rests on the presumption of guilt rather than innocence, little or no room remains for forgiveness and reintegration of the perpetrator, particularly if he or she is not a celebrity.[9] This way offences of the same or similar level of severity are punished differently

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[8] The lineage of cancel culture includes online celebrity and fandom culture, fan activism, Black oral traditions and digital practices (also known as *Black Twitter*), and digital activism.

[9] For instance, Bouvier and Machin (2021) question the power of cancel culture to achieve social justice based on the cases of three non-celebrities who faced cancelling because of racist behavior and point out that this practice can lead to the simplification and misrepresentation of complex issues such as racism.

based on the status of wrongdoers, i.e. whether or not they are famous individuals. Ross (2025) points out that for the rich and powerful life goes on normally soon after they face cancelling; it is regular people who do not seem to be able to recover. Furthermore, cancel practices based on problematic social media posts dating a few years back, when perhaps they were not considered questionable, have been disputed by journalists and academics alike (e.g. Ng, 2020; Powell, 2021; Spratt, 2018).

Examples of cancel culture are numerous and diverse as this phenomenon is rapidly spreading across the globe; we have chosen to mention a few illustrative ones from the western media. Among others, the well-known author of the Harry Potter series, J. K. Rowling, has been repeatedly cancelled due to her history of transphobic and antifeminist views, as well as her comments on gender identity; this is why her fans have frequently called for boycotts of her books (Gardner, 2024). Jordan Peterson, a famous clinical psychologist, professor and author, faced cancelling on a number of occasions on similar grounds, which is why he had his Twitter account suspended in June 2022 (Alang, 2022). The US president, Donald Trump, faced cancelling repeatedly during and after his previous presidency due to his racist, misogynist and supremacist comments. This is why his Twitter account was permanently banned in 2021 (Fung, 2021). Kanye West, a controversial musician, was one of the most cancelled celebrities last year. He faced cancelling on similar grounds as Trump with numerous brands ending collaboration with him because of this. The list goes on to include many more names from all walks of life.

When it comes to criticism directed towards cancel culture, Ng (2022: 73-74) has identified two directions that it has taken in the U.S.: left-wing, liberal critics claim that cancel culture is problematic on free speech and social justice grounds, whereas right-wing ones see it as an unfair attack on conservative values and policies and, consequently, on American identity. One of the most prominent liberal critiques of cancel culture came from *Harper's Magazine* on July 7, 2020 in *A Letter on Justice and Open Debate* signed by more than 150 prominent intellectuals and public figures (A Letter on Justice and Open Debate, 2020). The list of signatories includes, among others, Noam Chomsky, Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie, Francis Fukuyama etc. In the letter the signatories express their worries about the rising intolerance in public discourse and weakening of the principles of open debate, stating that the proponents of cancel culture advocate for ideological conformity. They claim that in western democracies censorship is spreading in the form of "an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty" (A Letter on Justice and Open Debate, 2020). Conservative commentary, on the other hand, has focused on the revision of media content and removal of historical monuments marked as racially problematic (Ng, 2022: 73).

Our intent in this paper is not to take sides, i.e. we shall not delve into neither critical commentary about the phenomenon of cancel culture as such nor criticism pertaining to it, though we will try to give a balanced view in the concluding section that follows. Rather, by placing cancel culture in the context of the spiral of silence theory, we strive to show the connection between hashtag activism, notably the

#MeToo movement, and cancel culture, which could explain the shift in power relations that is taking place in the digital public sphere and its consequences, which will be discussed in the concluding chapter as well.

Conclusion

From the perspective of public opinion, cancel culture, facilitated by social media platforms, has disrupted power relations allowing the silenced and disempowered to partake in the public discourse, thus challenging its Habermasean origins. This way topics outside the dominant discourse become part of it, mobilizing public attention and consequently going viral. From the perspective of the spiral of silence theory, once the wall of silence surrounding a certain topic is broken and the public starts feeling free to step forward and discuss issues formerly considered taboo, the spiraling process can reverse its course resulting in cancel culture which in turn stigmatizes and punishes opposing views. Therefore, it can be concluded that the nature of the spiral of silence tends to be circular – once one topic is no longer restricted in the public discourse, it tends to constrain criticism pertaining to it.

From the critical standpoint, cancel culture, as the outcome of hashtag activism, has undoubtedly led to recognizing numerous cases of misconduct revolving around race, gender and similar concerns as well as punishing wrongdoers (Ng, 2022: 64). Beginning with violence and inequality in the entertainment industry, it has spread to different realms directing public attention to problems that otherwise would have gone unnoticed and raising awareness of certain pressing issues facing marginalized groups today.

On the other hand, one of the main dangers of cancel culture is that anyone, a celebrity or a regular person, "can be #cancelled for voicing an unpopular view," which can result in people deciding not to speak out for fear of being called out, condemned or cancelled (Spratt, 2018). Such a black and white approach that fosters instantaneous and at times superficial criticism can flatten out complicated issues. Consequently, public debate is typically discouraged and violent online arguments ensue. This way cancel culture loses its transformative purpose and risks becoming nothing more than "a social media morality performance" (Spratt, 2018).

Bearing in mind these conflicting views, we are of the opinion that the middle ground in this case could be so called "accountability culture" or "call-in culture". Accountability culture represents a more libertarian version of cancel culture introduced by some activists and authors (Brown, 2020; Kornhaber, 2020). Namely, these authors believe that cancelling as a punitive practice has little potential for solving social justice issues in the long run and instead suggest a systemic, sustainable and just approach that fosters constructive dialogue between victims and wrongdoers, gives offenders a chance to repent, apologize and change, and victims an opportunity to be heard, to receive support on their way to healing and to forgive.

The concept of call-in culture is proposed by Loretta Ross (2025) and it suggests that real changes actually require calling people in, i.e. trying to establish a meaningful connection with others before canceling them (the author does maintain that calling out

can and should be used, but only as a last resort). Unlike cancel practices, the notion of call-in culture rests on forgiveness rather than shame, redemption rather than fear, and it empowers people to find the right response in every situation, to become more knowledgeable and responsible and to look beyond a façade.

Both accountability and call-in culture thus open up space for critical dialogue, penitence and forgiveness, but at the same time acknowledge the importance of accountability, reasonable moral disapproval and social justice, thus representing constructive and practical alternatives to cancel culture.

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Van granica hešteg aktivizma: kultura otkazivanja na društvenim mrežama

Marija Đurđević, Nastavnik engleskog jezika, Tehnološko-metalurški fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Kultura otkazivanja je novi fenomen i odnosi se na javno sramoćenje koje se odvija onlajn i bazirano je na primećenim moralnim prestupima poznatih ili anonimnih pojedinaca koje za posledicu može imati proterivanje ovih pojedinaca iz javne sfere, profesionalnih krugova ili društvene zajednice. Ova savremena forma ostrakizma najčešće zaobilazi tradicionalne institucije ukazujući na moć društvenih mreža da utiču na javno mnjenje i donose presude. Smatra se da kultura otkazivanja potiče iz pokreta #MeToo, onlajn kampanje koja je vođena na društvenim mrežama protiv seksualnog uznemiravanja. Cilj ovog rada je dvojak. Na prvom mestu, u radu nastojimo da ukažemo na važnost društvenih pokreta poput #MeToo zbog njihove moći da razbiju zloglasnu spiralu tišine. S druge strane, cilj nam je i da istražimo kulturu otkazivanja koja se javlja kao posledica onlajn aktivizma na društvenim mrežama, kao i određene alternative ovom fenomenu koje se javljaju u poslednje vreme.

Ključne reči: kultura otkazivanja, #MeToo, onlajn aktivizam, spirala tišine, javno sramoćenje

The Interdependence of Artificial Intelligence and Global Media Ethics

Aleksa Mitic[123], PhD Student, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia
Ivana Stojanović Prelević[4], Associate Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

The contemporary era is characterized by the rapid development of artificial intelligence and its subsequent impact on various aspects of everyday life. Through the application of artificial intelligence across diverse fields and the examination of its implications from multiple standpoints, researchers have identified numerous ethical dilemmas and concerns related to its utilization. Concurrent with the emergence of artificial intelligence in the early years of the twenty-first century, a novel concept of media ethics has emerged: global media ethics. A central element of this emerging field is the regulation of online communication, encompassing social networks and various media platforms. Based on two seminal ethical theories – deontology and cosmopolitanism, global media ethics elucidates issues in the new environment of media, which traditional media ethics did not examine. In this paper, the analysis starts from the hypothesis that adherence to deontology and cosmopolitanism would bring benefits to society in the context of using artificial intelligence. In this study, we methodically examine advantages and disadvantages of global media ethics, the benefits of artificial intelligence, and its drawbacks in the domain of journalism and social platforms utilized for journalistic activities, including the emergence of citizen journalism. The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that global media ethics aspires to enhance the media environment, and that artificial intelligence, when used responsibly, has the potential to contribute to this enhancement. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that significant responsibility lies with social media users, who have emerged as pivotal actors in media communication due to their role as media content producers.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, media ethics, global media ethics, deontology, cosmopolitanism

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[1] Scholarship holder of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation at the Innovation Center of the University of Niš.

[2] Corresponding author: a.mitic-19601@filfak.ni.ac.rs

[3] ORCID: 0009-0007-0889-8387

[4] ORCID: 0000-0003-0488-4715

The Interdependence of Artificial Intelligence and Global Media Ethics

Introduction

The development of artificial intelligence in the twenty-first century has greatly influenced and changed human activities in numerous areas of modern life. As different forms of artificial intelligence directly or indirectly have a significant impact on changes in human behavior (Silverman et al., 2016; Benvenutti et al., 2023), they also influence the elements that guide human behavior such as personal ethics and morality. Various areas of artificial intelligence fall under the suspicion of ethical correctness, where the questions of bias, loss of privacy and responsibility, as well as the reduced need to employ people and others are most often raised (Watters, 2023).

Artificial intelligence could be roughly described as "a set of ideas, technologies, and techniques that relate to the capacity of a computing system" (Brennen et al., 2018:1-2). The work process of artificial intelligence is related to the simulation of human intelligence and the processes that take place within it using a machine or software (Laskowski, Tucci, 2023). Considering the fact that our interest is limited to the relationship between artificial intelligence and media, we will list a few examples from that area: various software programs related to marketing, advertising and selection of advertisements; playback of music tracks on different platforms; regulation of censorship and control of publications in the form of truthfulness and various forms of discrimination (Jain, 2025). The development and application of artificial intelligence in the media have resulted in an increase in the number of contents that are entirely created by artificial intelligence or that software based on this technology has assisted in their production (Singh, 2023).

Having undergone major changes over the past decades, media ethics, with its innovations, increasingly strives to become the ethics of digital media. Taking into account that modern media are largely made up of various forms of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (Dewdney, Ride, 2013), media ethics partly becomes a correlate between already existing information and computer ethics. Additionally, a significant share of influence has been achieved recently by machine and robotic ethics (Ess, 2013).

In this paper, we will attempt to point out ethical problems related to the use of artificial intelligence. We will also analyze contemporary perception of the concept of global media ethics and its interrelationship with artificial intelligence. The general hypothesis of this paper is that digital technologies, led by artificial intelligence as the most significant innovation, largely determine new forms of ethical behavior and decision-making in contemporary media. On the other hand, codes of ethics for media and media organizations should contribute to the theoretical and regulatory foundation of the use of artificial intelligence. To confirm or deny this hypothesis we will rely on literature and references relevant for the topic of this paper

Towards Global Media Ethics

"Global media ethics does not exist, yet, at least not in a complementary form" is the opinion of a researcher in this field from the beginning of this century (Christians et al., 2010: 35). Today, fifteen years later, we can say that global media ethics, in its current form, represents a significant upgrade to existing media ethics.

Following the considerations of one of the founders of the concept of global media ethics, Stephen Ward, we see its purpose of existence. Ward believes that global media ethics seeks to articulate and critically examine the responsibilities of media that are now considered global in content, reach, and influence (Ward, 2013: 1), overcoming local and national frameworks, with the aspiration of encompassing the world on a global scale. In the sequel to his book "Global Media Ethics: Problems and Perspectives", Ward states that there are two basic causes of the media revolution in the context of global media ethics. First, he cites the emergence of the so-called "mixed news media", which, in addition to basic informative characteristics, have the ability to interact with the audience and are available online. The second cause is the accelerated globalization of media content and the media in general. According to Ward, these two characteristics of modern media define the goal of global media ethics. They create an agenda and motivate researchers to delve into this topic in more detail. The reasons for which it is necessary to research different aspects of global media ethics are divided into two groups, practical and ethical. Practical reasons relate to the inability of traditional media ethics to resolve the problems faced by contemporary journalism, which already has the epithet of global. Ethical reasons concern new responsibilities of global media, which have a worldwide scope and influence (Ward, 2013: 1-2; Ward, 2020).

The theoretical foundation of global media ethics, viewed from a purely ethical perspective, is based on the concept of "ethics of universal being". Clifford Christians is an advocate of the view that global media ethics is a concept without physical and geographical limitations, based on universal ethics of human dignity, truth, and peace (Christians, 2010). Therefore, there are two basic models of ethical theories that correspond to the concept of global media ethics. The first concept is related to the so-called "Kantian ethics", i.e., the deontological approach. The idea is that an individual's behavior should be viewed through the prism of the behavior of everyone else, as well as the concept of universal moral law (Mateus, 2019). The second concept is an example of cosmopolitanism, in which all people are represented as citizens of the world regardless of the nation and culture from which they originate (Ward, 2021).

Ward's main hypothesis is that moral globalism, like the theory of cosmopolitanism, must be preferential, but not exclusive, to other views. He further explains it in the spirit of accepting parochial values that should be incorporated into the ethical system (Ward, 2015: 23). Parochial is what is national, regional, local, etc. The opposite of parochial is global. This is not a question of completely erasing differences, on the contrary, differences can be preserved. Parochial values would be nurtured wherever they do not conflict with global values, but where they do, global values would prevail.

Cosmopolitanism originates from two Greek words *kosmos* - world or order and *polis* - city, state. Cosmopolitan (κοσμοπολίτης), literally translated, means a *citizen of the world*. Related to this meaning is the idea of cosmopolitanism among the Stoics. The modern interpretation of this term is that it is about the ideology that all human beings belong to the same political community based on moral equality (Stojadinović, 2016: 80). Cosmopolitanism is based on caring for others. In the media sphere, mainstream media would represent the main forums for discussion, promotion of universal values, and gathering of all media (Stojanović Prelević, 2019).

Deontology, on the other hand, is based on duty. Practice shows that the consequences of certain actions are equated with duties, which originated from the absolutist nature of this theory and the impossibility of applying the categorical imperative in certain situations. The main question in his ethics is: "What should I do?" We can find the answer in Kant's notion of the categorical imperative as a principle of mind that binds us. This would mean that when choosing an action, one should discard all maxims that cannot be universalized. Kant would reject false promises as a maxim, not because of the consequences that may be bad, but because we cannot make false promises as a general principle (O'Neil, 1997).

In the combination of deontological and cosmopolitan ethics, Ward finds a solution to the problem of traditional media ethics. In this way, individual duties and universal values are highlighted.

In the context of the discussion on global media ethics, Ward proposes the creation of radical ethics, i.e., the codification of all new forms of communication – online journalism, data journalism, brand journalism, citizen journalism, etc. According to him, future ethics should look like this: ethics of the new media ecology; ethics of using new media, ethics of interpretation and expression of opinion; ethics of activism and ethics of a global democratic society (Ward, 2014: 51). All of this points to new forms of communication that have been present for a long time, for instance, journalists are using social media posts, fact-based journalism is replacing interpretive journalism, activism is developing in contrast to investigative journalism, while the ethics of a global democratic society directly refers to free and responsible news publishing (Stojanović Prelević, 2019).

Ethical Reasons for Researching Global Media Ethics

Global media ethics should be researched through a synergy of both practical and ethical reasons. The development of technology and digitization caused the emergence of new forms of journalism and new relationships between the audience and the media. The number of content producers has also multiplied due to the emergence of social networks. Artificial intelligence has found its usage in journalism. Among the new forms of journalism, we highlight data journalism, citizen journalism, and brand journalism. The media has long had its own online editions, so the need to redefine ethics is urgent. Here we highlight an important relationship of global media ethics, which covers the areas of new forms of journalism, behavior on social networks, and political activism,

to traditional media ethics, namely that global ethics is based on traditional ethics (Stojanović Prelević, 2022). The values that were valid in traditional media ethics remain global, although there may be changes in interpretation and representation. Moreover, we can notice that the new innovative forms have a completely different appearance and a different relationship to values in the sense of giving importance or priority. Thus, in brand journalism, the value of independence is not significant, while telling the truth is. Therefore, many will say that brand journalism is not journalism at all, but content marketing or public relations (Koch et al., 2021). We can say that citizen journalism respects the value of independence, but it can happen that the truth is not respected. On the other hand, it happens that mainstream media do not respect any of these principles in some situations due to the presence of censorship and self-censorship, which leads to a crisis in the journalistic profession, a decline in trust in the media, etc. As citizen users of social media become *prosumers*,[5] ethics is also desirable in their actions in the media sphere. Social networks can help organize and act on behalf of certain groups. An example of this are the student protests in Serbia at the end of November 2024. Social media not only helped connect students from different cities, but also had a greater impact thanks to the mass of social networks and posts on social networks that were objective and timely, unlike the reporting of most media in Serbia, including the national service. In modern society, we increasingly talk about responsibility, and in reality, everyone who posts or comments is responsible for the message they send. Codification of values according to Word could regulate this behavior. Considering the fact that codes in the field of journalism have existed for a long time and yet we encounter great disregard for the codes, we are pessimistic that the existence of codes can help in ethical behavior. Ethical education must be a priority, namely learning global media ethics, as this would first encourage social media users to respect ethical values proposed in ethical codes when producing media content or publications.

Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and Media Ethics

Artificial intelligence and media ethics, or the media, have common problems and challenges that they face. The basic problem is the problem of definition; neither artificial intelligence nor media ethics have a standard and generally accepted definition, which results in difficulty in resolving the ethical problems they face. The lack of a definition significantly slows down and complicates the understanding of concepts as well as determining the limits of their actions. The widespread adoption of machine learning in the 2010s, fueled by advances in big data and computing power, brought new ethical challenges. As Stryker explains, these new challenges are: bias, transparency and the use of personal data. Additionally, AI ethics emerged as a distinct discipline during this period as tech companies and AI research institutions sought to proactively manage their AI efforts responsibly (Stryker, 2024).

The main ethical problems of artificial intelligence can be divided into several groups, i.e., categories: 1. Human rights ethics – unequal access to artificial

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[5] Prosumers are producers and users of media content.

intelligence; 2. Moral philosophy – artificial intelligence should be endowed with a moral component, and simply make judgments and conclusions (Bryson, 2018); 3. Information ethics – requirements and conditions for the dissemination, management and use of information; 4. Ethics of prejudice – artificial intelligence to a certain extent produces biased results; 5. Ethics of responsibility – the question arises of who is responsible for its mistakes; 6. Ethical ecology – the use of artificial intelligence requires consumption of a large amount of energy (Li et al., 2019: 102-103).

The causes of ethical problems related to artificial intelligence can be divided into four groups. The first group consists of technical limitations. Artificial intelligence bases its work on learning algorithms, while it still lags behind the domain of human and moral values. The second group includes deficiencies in ethical principles. The development of technology has led to an increasingly frequent perception of man through the prism of materialism, where the boundaries between humans and machines are increasingly blurred. The third group of reasons is related to the incorrect creation of artificial intelligence policy. The policy of the work of artificial intelligence directs its focus mainly on the technical and economic aspects, while the sociological and philosophical, i.e., ethical aspects remain marginalized. The fourth group consists of the reasons for insufficiently perfected mechanisms of supervision and work control (Li et al., 2019: 103).

When it comes to media ethics, we have already mentioned that it deals with the evaluation of media activity, that is, the ethical and moral correctness and incorrectness of media reporting. The way the media reports and broadcasts certain content, as well as the selection of that content, often encourages the emergence of ethical dilemmas. One of the everyday cases of inappropriate media reporting is bias. On the other hand, one of the basic media postulates is neutrality and objectivity in the selection and transmission of information (Puglisi et al., 2015). Moreover, the basic principles such as truthfulness, independence and impartiality, which have the status of inviolability in the ethical behavior of the media (Celiberti et al. 2015), are frequently violated and neglected to a great extent.

Looking at the ethical challenges and problems faced by artificial intelligence and the media, we see that to some extent these problems coincide, that is, they are similar in certain characteristics. However, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that these are the only ethical problems; instead, they are an intersection, or rather, their common problems. The way in which seemingly the same problems and dilemmas will be resolved will not be identical, given that they constitute different areas. Although we talk about the media as being ethical or unethical, it should be kept in mind that the media is made up of media workers who determine such status. We also believe that artificial intelligence is not responsible in itself, but that part of the responsibility also falls on the engineers, programmers, and designers who designed and configured it, as well as on technology companies and users themselves.

Nevertheless, the term "responsible AI" is used in practice. Responsible artificial intelligence (AI) is described as a set of principles that help guide the design, development, deployment and use of AI—building trust in AI solutions

that have the potential to empower organizations and their stakeholders (Stryker, 2024). AI must be trustworthy. In addition, it must be transparent, which is very important for stakeholders. Veeneandaal indicates the following risks of using AI: errors or incorrect data, bias and discrimination, lack of interpretability, performance instability, inability to scale, costly penalties and fines (Veenendaal, n.d.). Principles for responsible use of AI are: fairness and inclusiveness, privacy and security, transparency, accountability, reliability and safety. In order to implement such principles in practice, it is necessary to have a strategic plan for implementing responsible AI.

Artificial intelligence and Journalism – the Examples of ChatGPT and Deepfake

The emergence of ChatGPT has greatly facilitated the work of many professions. ChatGPT can be most simply described as an artificial intelligence bot that can answer questions, write essays and program computers. This is one of the largest AI models for language processing, with as many as 175 billion parameters (Danas, 2023; Ortiz, 2024). The main feature is that it has the ability to generate text as a human would in a text box, therefore it is suitable for chatbots, conversational systems, and virtual assistants. These are the actions it can do: write code, write an article, translate text, debug a program, and write a story/poem (Danas, 2023; Ortiz, 2024). However, this bot still does not know everything, mistakes and untruths can be sneaked in. One of the professions where it is used is journalism. But not all journalists have a positive attitude toward the usage of ChatGPT. Selma Fukelj for Media Center says "*Most of the journalists we talked to about GenAI state either that they have not used its tools so far or after testing they decided not to use them because they doubt the veracity of the information it provides. Ethics is one of the reasons why journalists refuse to use these tools in their work*" (Fukelj, 2023).

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) surveyed journalists, editors and media professionals last year in April and May to see how much they use GenAI tools. A total of 101 participants from all over the world took part, half of whom stated that they already use these tools in their work. A fifth of all participants have guidelines on how to use them. The biggest reason for using them is that they can summarize information and simplify research and investigation (Fukelj, 2023).

Pamela Howard, at a webinar held in February 2023 on global crisis reporting, spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of ChatGPT in journalism. This tool is also useful for journalists whose native language is not English. Simplifying the text and translating particularly specialized pieces of text helps journalists to better understand the topic. It can also be helpful for interview writing, especially when it comes to preparation. The journalist asks a question and the software then creates new questions based on the given ones. Another useful feature is the sub-editor. Journalists can submit their articles for final review and then send them to the editor after editing. However, fact-checking is essential (Cemaj Hochstein, 2023).

Regarding the use of deepfakes in journalism, Deanna Ritchie says: "As it stands, the impact of deepfakes can already be felt in industries like entertainment, politics, and social media. Sectors like journalism – considered a cornerstone of various societies – are also not exempt. For some, this could be a worrying trend".

Deepfakes use a form of artificial intelligence called deep learning to create images of fake events. This technology applies not only to videos, but also to photos and audio. Even an entire identity could be created using deepfake technology.

Here are the areas in which a deepfake can blur the line between reality and fiction:

1. Threat to the truth of information and news,
2. Require more work and research,
3. Enable the rise of alternative realities (Cemaj Hochstein, 2023).

Consequently, deepfake technology allows for the creation of more sophisticated images and videos and makes it easy to manipulate the audience. In journalism, timeliness is the most important element, along with accuracy, but due to the emergence of deepfake, the veracity of information must be verified for a longer time. Ritchie explains that the Wall Street Journal has an internal working group to detect deepfakes. There is also the danger of the Mandela effect, because people remember information they see first for a long time even if it is false. Therefore, caution is recommended.

Conclusion

The basic problem of global media ethics is its lack of foundation. In this paper, we are specifically referring to its academic foundation, which will bring increased interest among researchers, which later leads to its definition and acceptance by other disciplines. The tendency towards changes due to the impact of technology on global media ethics allows for assistance from artificial intelligence, given that much of the media contains some form of artificial intelligence. Its improvement, both theoretical and practical, will contribute to the development of the media both locally and globally. As artificial intelligence takes on a global scale, addressing ethical issues surrounding the use of AI can help lay the foundation for global ethics in the media field. From the aspects of cosmopolitanism and deontology, one should be very careful with the use of AI, or even exclusive. Deepfake is particularly dangerous because it undermines reality, and we can conclude that it is not a good tool for journalism or has not yet proven to be good. There are justifications for using ChatGPT: easier search, data collection, etc. The initial hypothesis of this paper, which assumes that artificial intelligence as a leading digital innovation significantly influences ethical behavior and decision-making in modern media, has been confirmed.

The interdependence of global media ethics and artificial intelligence is also realized through the development of both fields. In recent years, the media has increasingly assumed the global status, thanks to artificial intelligence, which

requires additional research into media ethics; in this case, it becomes global. On the other hand, artificial intelligence, in addition to the practical development that occurs during its specific application in the media, is also experiencing a higher-quality theoretical definition. In the near future, media researchers will increasingly deal with artificial intelligence as an integral part of the structure of media systems, while resolving ethical problems will contribute to the institutionalization of global media ethics.

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Veštačka inteligencija i globalna medijska etika – međuzavisnost

Aleksa Mitić, Student doktorskih studija, Filozofski fakultet,
Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija
Ivana Stojanović-Prelević, Vanredni profesor, Filozofski fakultet,
Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Svedoci smo brzog razvoja veštačke inteligencije i njenog uticaja na svakodnevni život. Primenjujući veštačku inteligenciju u različitim sferama i posmatrajući je iz različitih perspektiva, istraživači su se susreli sa brojnim etičkim dilemama i nedoumicama vezanim za njeno korišćenje. Paralelno sa veštačkom inteligencijom u prvim decenijama dvadeset prvog veka razvija se novi koncept medijske etike – ,,globalna medijska etika". Ona bi trebalo da reguliše i komunkaciju u onlajn sferi, od društvenih mreža do različitih medijskih platformi. Utemeljena na dvema etičkim teorijama – deontološkoj i kosmopolitskoj, globalna medijska etika objašnjava probleme u novom medijskom okruženju, koje tradicionalna medijska etika nije ispitivala. U ovom radu polazimo od hipoteze da bi poštovanje deontologije i kosmpopolitizma donelo benefite društvu kada je reč o korišćenju veštačke inteligencije. Ovde ispitujemo prednosti i nedostatke globalne medijske etike, zatim prednosti upotrebe veštačke inteligencije i njene loše strane, kada je reč o sferi novinarstva, i društvenih platformi korišćenih za novinarsko delovanje, ovde mislimo i na pojavu građanskog novinarstva. Zaključak je, da globalna medijska etika ima pretenzija da učini medijsko okruženje povoljnijim za društvo i da veštačka inteligencija korišćena odgovorno to isto okruženje može učiniti prijatnijim. Dalje, pokazalo se da je velika odgovornost na samim korisnicima društvenih medija i da su oni podjednako važni akteri u medijskoj komunikaciji, s obzirom da i oni postaju prozvođači medijskog sadržaja.

Ključne reči: veštačka inteligencija, medijska etika, globalna medijska etika, deontologija, kosmopolitizam

The Evolution of Electronic Media Legal Regulation in the European Union[1][2]

Andrej Blagojević[3][4], Assistant Professor, Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

It is widely recognized that the effective legal regulation of electronic media is essential for a diverse, accessible, and responsible media landscape. Within the European Union, this regulation has evolved significantly over time, reflecting the dynamic nature of the media environment. This paper examines the evolution of legal regulation of radio and television in the European Union, charting its course from the foundational Television Without Frontiers Directive (1989) and the Satellite and Cable Directive (1993, revised 2019), to its current cornerstone, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD, 2010, revised 2018). The paper primarily focuses on the AVMSD as the most significant legal act shaping the EU's electronic media landscape. Furthermore, it analyzes the impact of recent legal frameworks— the Digital Services Act (2022), the Digital Markets Act (2022), and the European Media Freedom Act (2024)—demonstrating how these regulations, while not primarily designed for traditional electronic media, nonetheless have a significant impact on them. Through an analysis of these legislative developments, the paper explores how the EU's approach has evolved over the years in response to technological advancements, market competition, media freedom challenges, and the regulation of digital platforms and streaming services.

Keywords: electronic media, media regulation, Audiovisual Media Services Directive, European Union

The Evolution of Electronic Media Legal Regulation in the European Union

Introduction

The accelerated technological progress had led to the emergence of the first electronic media in the 20th century, which soon became the dominant form of media.

[3] Corresponding author: andrej.blagojevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

[4] ORCID: 0000-0003-1124-2403

This dominant role of electronic media has been maintained to this day, despite the fact that the development of the Internet has significantly impacted both the technical aspects of broadcasting and consumer perceptions and habits. "The development of communication media has transformed the spatial and temporal constitution of social life, creating new forms of action and interaction which are no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale" (Thompson, 1995: 62). Along with the rise of electronic media, significant attention has been given to their legal framework. In continental Europe, a large number of laws regulating electronic media have been enacted, primarily due to the regional integration of European countries through the establishment of the European Union and the formation of the Council of Europe.

The most significant legal provisions regarding electronic media include regulations, directives, and decisions that apply to EU member states. On the other hand, the conventions and protocols of the Council of Europe are crucial legal documents that affect not only EU countries but also those outside the Union that are members of the Council. While regulations and directives are among the most important acts of the European Union, numerous non-binding acts—such as recommendations, opinions, and Green Papers, White Papers, and Communications from the European Commission—also play a significant role in shaping the legal framework for audiovisual (electronic) media in this region. Additionally, many resolutions, recommendations, and declarations from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe hold considerable importance. "The legal regulation of broadcast television and radio is critical in maintaining a fair and diverse media landscape, ensuring that broadcasters fulfill their public service obligations while providing the necessary checks and balances to prevent monopolistic practices" (Benjamin, Speta, & Shelanski, 2001: 214).

The paper will present the regulatory framework for electronic media at the EU level through its binding acts. The analysis will focus on traditional electronic media, specifically radio and television programs. It will provide a detailed examination of the two most significant European legal regulations at the EU level that exclusively pertain to these media: the Television without Frontiers Directive of 1989 and its successor, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive of 2010, revised in 2018. Additionally, the Satellite and Cable Directive from 1993 will be closely analyzed, as it holds particular significance from a copyright perspective for radio and television. In the end, the paper will also examine some of the recent EU regulations that have an indirect impact on electronic media.

The Beginnings of Electronic Media Legal Regulation in the European Union

The legal framework governing traditional electronic media within the European Union has evolved over several decades, with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive standing as its most significant cornerstone. Originally adopted in 2010 and revised in 2018, this directive was preceded by numerous legislative provisions concerning media services, established during the formative years of

European integration. The earliest relevant provisions can be traced back to the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community in 1957, which laid the foundation for a unified market for services among EU member states. Certain clauses within this treaty explicitly addressed media services, recognizing their role in the broader economic and cultural landscape of the Union.

Furthermore, one of the two fundamental treaties that form the constitutional basis of the European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, also includes media-related regulations. It emphasizes cooperation among member states in various cultural domains, including "artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector" (The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – consolidated version 2012, C 326/47, Article 167), while also underscoring the EU's commitment to fostering an open and competitive market to ensure the smooth functioning of its industries (Article 173). Another pivotal document in this regard is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which guarantees every individual the right to freedom of expression, as well as media freedom and pluralism (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2000/C 364/01, Article 11).

By the 1980s, the growing recognition of media services as a key part of the internal market led to important amendments to the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, as well as the adoption of the Single European Act. These legislative changes laid the foundation for a unified internal market and made it necessary to regulate the audiovisual sector. In response, the European Commission introduced concrete measures, including the Green Paper on the Establishment of the Common Market for Broadcasting, especially by Satellite and Cable (COM (84) 300 final, 1984). This document was designed to stimulate debate and set objectives for creating a harmonized audiovisual market, a goal realized five years later with the adoption of the first directive on audiovisual services, Television Without Frontiers (TWF). The Green Paper emerged as a response to the regulatory inconsistencies among member states, particularly concerning commercial advertising. The legal basis for this initiative on the liberalization of media services was established through rulings of the European Court of Justice, which affirmed the supranational character of broadcasting and prohibited any form of discriminatory treatment toward broadcasters from other Member States.[5]

According to Peter Humphreys, the Green Paper stipulates that Member States retain jurisdiction over their broadcasters within their national borders, while in the case of cross-border broadcasting, all broadcasters must comply with the minimum standards established by the European Union (Humphreys, 1996: 265). One of the most pressing issues addressed by the European Commission was the regulation of commercial advertising, which was seen as a crucial driver of the commercial media sector and a primary source of revenue. Due to the lack of harmonized legal provisions among member states, this was previously unfeasible. The Green Paper also advocated for the removal of internal barriers to national television programs

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[5] Judgment of the Court of Justice, Sacchi, Case 155/73 (30 April 1974); Judgment of the Court of Justice, Roi vs. Debauve, Case 52/79 (18 March 1980).

and the establishment of a broadcasters' organization, all aimed at fostering a unified broadcasting market.

Although the 1980s marked the full recognition of the audiovisual sector's importance within the EU single market, leading to the adoption of the Television Without Frontiers Directive, the following decade saw a temporary slowdown in audiovisual policy development. The focus shifted towards the telecommunications sector, which was perceived as more economically significant and vital for the advancement of the information society, in contrast to what was then regarded as "outdated" television (Näränen, 2005: 36). However, the early 21st century witnessed a renewed emphasis on audiovisual regulation, driven by rapid technological advancements. Several key documents contributed to this resurgence, ultimately leading to the revision and codification of the existing Television Without Frontiers Directive. These included the E-commerce Directive of 2000 (Directive 2000/31/EC on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market), the European Commission's Communication on Principles and Guidelines for the Community's Audiovisual Policy in the Digital Age (COM/99/0657), and the Communication on the Future of European Regulatory Audiovisual Policy (COM/2003/0784). These policy initiatives paved the way for the adoption of a new regulatory framework essential for the governance of electronic media: the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, introduced in 2007 and later amended in 2010.

Key directives governing radio and television

The initial provisions related to media and media services, adopted during the establishment of the European Union, laid the foundation for the adoption of key documents that shaped the regulatory framework for electronic media. This process started with the publication of the Green Paper by the European Commission. The primary goal of the Green Paper was to establish binding norms for media services across the European Union, a goal achieved with the adoption of the Television Without Frontiers Directive in 1989 (Council Directive 89/552/EEC of 3 October 1989 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation, or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities). This was the first step in creating a regulatory framework for the media market, followed by the Audiovisual Media Services Directive in 2010 (Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation, or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services). The legal nature of these documents allowed Member States to determine how to achieve the objectives set forth in the directives, while also establishing the minimum obligations each Member State must fulfill.

The Television Without Frontiers Directive of 1989

The *Television Without Frontiers Directive* consists of seven chapters: Definitions, General Provisions, Production and Distribution of Television Programs, Television Advertising and Sponsorship, Protection of Minors, Right of Reply, and Final Provisions. The following analysis examines each of these chapters in detail, citing the relevant articles.

The first chapter establishes key definitions fundamental to the Directive, including television broadcasting, television advertising, surreptitious advertising, and sponsorship. These definitions highlight the Directive's dual purpose: facilitating the free circulation of television broadcasts across Member States while setting regulatory standards for advertising within the EU (Article 1).

The second chapter outlines the obligations of Member States to ensure that all broadcasters under their jurisdiction adhere to national broadcasting standards. Additionally, it mandates the free transmission and retransmission of television content from other Member States. This chapter also defines the circumstances under which Member States may impose broadcasting restrictions and clarifies the European Commission's supervisory role in overseeing these measures (Articles 2–3).

The Directive establishes quotas to promote European audiovisual content, requiring broadcasters to dedicate at least 10% of their programming to works produced by independent European producers (Articles 4–5). It further defines European audiovisual works and mandates that Member States submit reports to the European Commission on compliance with these content obligations, though local television broadcasters are exempt from these requirements (Articles 6–9).

One of the most pivotal sections of the Directive pertains to television advertising and sponsorship. It introduces regulations that remain fundamental to modern audiovisual law, such as the requirement that advertisements be clearly distinguishable from editorial content and the prohibition of subliminal messaging and surreptitious advertising (Article 10). Additionally, this section establishes rules on the duration, placement, and scheduling of advertisements, the use of sponsorship, and restrictions on advertising for certain product categories, including tobacco, alcohol, and medicinal products (Articles 11–21).

The fifth chapter addresses the protection of minors, imposing a duty on Member States to prevent the broadcast of content that could be harmful to children's physical, mental, or moral development. Moreover, it explicitly bans content that incites hatred (Article 22).

The penultimate chapter emphasizes the significance of the right of reply, ensuring that individuals who believe they have been adversely affected by false or misleading information broadcast on television are provided a means to seek correction or redress (Article 23). The final provisions set a two-year timeframe for Member States to implement the Directive, which played a crucial role in establishing a baseline regulatory framework for television broadcasting across the European market (Articles 24–27).

The 1989 Television Without Frontiers Directive's significance at the time was immense, marking the true beginning of the European media space we know today. It was key to shaping the modern European media landscape by establishing a framework for cross-border television broadcasting and fostering a single market for television services. It enabled the free flow of information, increased viewer choice, promoted European audiovisual works, and laid the foundation for future European media policy, significantly contributing to European integration.

This directive underwent two significant revisions, in 1997 and 2007. The 1997 amendment aimed to refine key provisions by clarifying the country-of-origin principle for broadcasters, defining events of public interest, introducing regulations on television sales, and reinforcing protections for minors. The 2007 amendments, by contrast, responded to rapid technological advancements that transformed the media landscape, necessitating regulatory adjustments to accommodate emerging digital media services within the evolving digital single market.

The Satellite Broadcasting and Cable Retransmission Directive of 1993

Although primarily focused on copyright law, the *Satellite Broadcasting and Cable Retransmission Directive* (Council Directive 93/83/EEC on the coordination of certain rules concerning copyright and rights related to copyright applicable to satellite broadcasting and cable retransmission) was designed to regulate television and radio programs within the *acquis communautaire*. Its objective was to establish legal provisions for the distribution of radio and television programs via satellite and cable—technologically advanced forms of broadcasting at the time—and respond to the challenges that terrestrial broadcasting had not posed previously.

The first chapter of the Directive defines satellite broadcasting and cable retransmission, specifying the concept of a satellite and the country of origin, while when it comes to cable retransmission, it outlines only the conditions under which a program is considered to be retransmitted from another state (Article 1). The second chapter deals specifically with satellite broadcasting, setting out the obligations of Member States regarding licensing agreements for the transmission of rights for satellite broadcasting, the mandatory application of collective rights management rules, and the protection of performers, phonogram producers, and broadcasting organizations. It also establishes a minimum level of protection, which Member States may choose to extend by mutual agreement (Articles 2–7). The third chapter concerns cable retransmission, specifically the obligations of receiving states regarding compliance with copyright law through contractual agreements, the rights and responsibilities of collective copyright management organizations, the duty of Member States to provide mediation in the absence of retransmission agreements, and the requirement to conduct negotiations in good faith when granting retransmission authorizations (Articles 8–12). The final chapter contains the concluding provisions related to the implementation of the Directive (Articles 13–15).

Therefore, the Directive enabled satellite broadcasters and cable retransmitters to obtain significant rights concerning the use of copyrighted and related works

beyond the borders of the broadcasting state. At the same time, it provided legal protection for authors and ensured a regulatory framework that safeguarded the interests of all parties involved.

Audiovisual Media Services Directive of 2010

The 2007 amendments to the Television Without Frontiers Directive resulted in the adoption of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive[6], which represents the most significant legal document regulating the area of audiovisual services at the European Union level. Almost all of its content is based on the Television Without Frontiers Directive, ensuring continuity while broadening the scope of its regulation. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive consists of the following sections: Definitions, General Provisions, Provisions Applicable to All Audiovisual Media Services, Provisions Relating to On-Demand Audiovisual Media Services, Provisions Concerning Exclusive Rights and Short News Reports in Television Broadcasting, Distribution and Production of Television Programmes, Television Advertising and Teleshopping, Protection of Minors in Television Broadcasting, Right of Reply in Television Broadcasting, Contact Committee, Cooperation Between Regulatory Bodies and Member States, and Final Provisions.

The directive introduces new concepts and definitions compared to its predecessor. In its first chapter, it retains four fundamental definitions related to television broadcasting and advertising while broadening the scope of regulation by defining additional terms such as audiovisual media services, providers of audiovisual media services, on-demand audiovisual media services, editorial responsibility, and others (Article 1). The General Provisions establish the concept of audiovisual media service providers by outlining jurisdictional rules for Member States, determining when and under what conditions a provider falls within a Member State's jurisdiction (Article 2). The next article mandates that each Member State must ensure the free reception and retransmission of audiovisual media services from another Member State, while also detailing permissible restrictions and the procedure before the European Commission, including derogations related to on-demand audiovisual media services (Article 3). Furthermore, a Member State may, under specific conditions, impose stricter rules on service providers under its jurisdiction than those outlined in the directive while managing its relationship with other Member States on broadcasting matters (Article 4).

The next two chapters cover provisions applicable to all audiovisual media services and those specifically addressing on-demand audiovisual media services. The provisions applicable to all audiovisual media services outline Member States' responsibilities in regulating providers under their jurisdiction. They require that providers make a minimum set of information available to service recipients (Article 5). Additional provisions prohibit incitement to hatred, ensure accessibility for

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[6] The technical and technological development has led to the emergence of new media, which have become equal in status to television, the previously dominant form of media. As a result, the term "television" had to be replaced with the term "audiovisual services."

individuals with visual and hearing impairments, and regulate scheduling restrictions for broadcasting cinematographic works (Articles 6–8). Regarding advertising and sponsorship, the regulatory framework remains largely unchanged, with a slight deregulation in terms of advertising volume restrictions. Provisions established by the Television Without Frontiers Directive, such as those on surreptitious advertising, subliminal messages, and advertising of specific product categories, remain largely intact. However, the directive introduces the term "audiovisual commercial communications" in place of "television advertising" and includes new rules on product placement (Articles 9–11).

A key addition to the directive is the chapter dedicated exclusively to on-demand audiovisual media services. This section sets forth obligations regarding the protection of minors, the promotion and availability of European works, and the monitoring of compliance with these provisions through reporting to the Commission (Articles 12–13). The directive also addresses rights in television broadcasting and short news reports, as well as the distribution and production of exclusive television programming. Member States are granted the authority to designate events of major importance to society and prevent exclusive broadcasting of such events by broadcasters under their jurisdiction. They must also ensure that events designated by another Member State as significant public interest events are not broadcast exclusively (Article 14). Additionally, broadcasters and media outlets have the right to use short extracts of news for general news programs, even when another broadcaster holds exclusive rights, provided that any compensation does not exceed the actual costs incurred for granting access (Article 15).

The sixth chapter focuses on the distribution and production of television programming. Similar to the Television Without Frontiers Directive, the directive requires that broadcasters ensure the majority of their programming consists of European audiovisual works and that at least 10% of their overall programming is reserved for independent European producers, except for programming intended for local audiences (Articles 16–18).

The next chapter regulates advertising, defining the conditions under which television advertising and teleshopping are permitted. In addition to requiring clear identification of advertising content in relation to editorial programming, the directive emphasizes preserving programming integrity, ensuring coherence when incorporating advertisements (Articles 19–20). It further specifies that during the broadcasting of cinematographic works or children's programming, advertising breaks or teleshopping may be inserted only once per scheduled period of at least 30 minutes (Article 20). Additional provisions prohibit the advertising of medicinal products and establish regulations for advertising alcoholic beverages (Articles 21–22). As in the previous directive, television advertisements may not exceed 20% of the hourly broadcasting time, while teleshopping windows must be clearly marked and last at least 15 consecutive minutes (Articles 23–24). Exceptions apply depending on the nature of the program (Articles 25–26).

Similar to its predecessor, the 2010 Directive mandates that Member States ensure broadcasters under their jurisdiction do not transmit programs that could

seriously impair the physical, mental, or moral development of minors, except in cases where technical measures or watershed restrictions prevent minors from accessing such content (Article 27). When necessary, a sound alert must be broadcast beforehand, or an appropriate visual symbol must be displayed throughout the program (Article 27).

Regarding the right of reply, the directive retains provisions similar to those in its predecessor, guaranteeing the right of individuals to respond if affected by false information. Member States must provide appropriate legal remedies, independent of other national legal norms (Article 28). A key novelty is the requirement that Member States ensure the right of reply is not subject to unreasonable conditions, with responses published within a reasonable timeframe and in an appropriate manner (Article 28).

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive establishes the Contact Committee, an advisory body under the European Commission, responsible for monitoring the directive's implementation. The committee consults on issues arising from its application, issues opinions, and serves as a forum for exchanging views on relevant matters (Article 29). It also examines stakeholder consultations and assesses progress in the field (Article 29). The following chapter outlines cooperation between Member States and the Commission (Article 30).

The Final Provisions clarify that the directive does not override other conventions, unless they fall within its scope, and require Member States to submit national legal provisions covering areas regulated by the directive (Articles 31–32). The Commission must also submit triennial reports on audiovisual media services, considering the specificities of Member States (Article 33). Finally, the Television Without Frontiers Directive is repealed and replaced by this directive (Article 34).

Revised Directive on Audiovisual Media Services of 2018

The continued convergence of media, along with the creation of new methods for producing and using audiovisual content, required an update to the 2010 Directive. The need to regulate new forms of audiovisual services was first highlighted in the *Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe* (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions – A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe, COM/2015/0192 final) and later addressed through the revision of the Directive.

While one of the main reasons for revising and transforming the original *Television Without Frontiers Directive* into the *Audiovisual Media Services Directive* was to broaden the definition of audiovisual services and regulate non-linear media services with more relaxed advertising rules, the 2018 revision aimed to address new video sharing platforms. As stated in the preamble of the revised Directive on Audiovisual Media Services, media convergence necessitates updating the legal framework to better adapt to market developments and establish a balance between access to online content, consumer protection, and competition (Directive (EU)

2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2010/13/EU (Audiovisual Media Services Directive) in response to changing market realities, preamble). The most significant changes to the Directive will be highlighted in the following section, focusing on the articles that have been modified or added.

In the first chapter of the revised Directive, the main reason for the revision is immediately apparent. A definition was introduced regarding the platform service for video content sharing, aimed at providing the public with programs and/or user-generated video content, where the platform provider does not assume editorial responsibility. This extension of the Directive's scope now includes video-sharing platforms (such as YouTube and Dailymotion), as well as audiovisual content shared via social networks (such as Facebook and Instagram). In addition to this new concept of video-sharing platforms, the chapter includes modifications to existing points to cover video content more broadly, while introducing new terms, such as user-generated content, editorial decisions, and video-sharing platform providers (Article 1).

The most significant changes in the second chapter of the revised Directive, now titled *General Provisions on Audiovisual Services*, focus on the relationship between the Commission, member states, and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA). Established by the Commission's decision in 2014, ERGA serves as its advisory and support body for implementing media regulation on audiovisual media services within member states. The importance of ERGA is highlighted in subsequent chapters, particularly in the section dealing with regulatory bodies. The second chapter specifies increased responsibility for member states in overseeing media service providers under their jurisdiction, cooperation with the Commission regarding media service provider registration, and the handling of disputes between member states concerning jurisdiction over service providers (Article 3). It also defines procedures for restricting media services from one member state to another. A new aspect is the promotion of self-regulation through codes of conduct, which are drafted at the national level by major stakeholders (Article 4a).

The section of the Directive that underwent the most changes is the third chapter, *Provisions Applicable to Audiovisual Media Services*, where nearly all articles (except one) were replaced or supplemented with new provisions. Member states are now encouraged to enhance transparency of media service providers' ownership structures (Article 5) and to improve protections against content that could harm minors (Article 6a). More detailed measures regarding the accessibility of media services for individuals with disabilities are also introduced (Article 7). Additionally, product placement in programs is no longer explicitly prohibited, as it was under the previous Directive, but is now generally allowed, with specific limitations (Article 11). The chapter that previously focused on on-demand audiovisual services is now integrated into the third chapter, including articles that were once in the fourth chapter. This section now addresses on-demand media services in detail. The proportion of European audiovisual works is set at 30%, and financial contributions to their production are specified (Article 13).

While the chapters on exclusive rights and short news in television broadcasting, as well as the section on television program distribution and production, did not

undergo significant changes, there are some amendments related to television advertising and teleshopping (TV shopping). These are allowed during sports events but prohibited in children's programming (Articles 19-20). The regulation of the total amount of advertising in a program on a daily basis is now more clearly defined (Article 23). Another change is that the chapter on the protection of minors is no longer a separate section in the revised Directive, while the chapters on the right of reply in television broadcasting and the Contact Committee remain unchanged.

Notable innovations in the Directive include the regulation of video-sharing platforms, which is now addressed in an entirely new chapter (IXa). This chapter brings platforms meeting the definition of a video-sharing platform under the Directive, including those offering user-generated content, such as Facebook or YouTube, within its scope. The chapter dealing with regulatory bodies overseeing media services within member states has also been significantly expanded. Jurisdiction over these platforms, the creation of a register of service providers, and the relationships between member states, the Commission, European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media, and the Contact Committees are now more clearly defined, especially in cases of jurisdictional disputes. (Article 28a). Special protections for minors from harmful content, as well as safeguards against hate speech and content promoting criminal acts such as terrorism, child pornography, racism, and xenophobia, are outlined (Article 28b). The same restrictions on commercial communications that apply to linear communications and on-demand video content also apply to video-sharing platforms, with member states bearing specific responsibilities. The Directive further establishes measures to protect against unlawful content, including judicial, extrajudicial, and self-regulatory mechanisms through codes of conduct (Article 28b).

A significant portion of the Directive is dedicated to the regulatory bodies of member states and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA). In the previous Directive, this chapter contains just one article, but it has now been expanded to emphasize the independence and impartiality of regulatory bodies in relation to national authorities and other entities within member states (Article 30). The Directive also prescribes cooperation between regulatory bodies of member states when media service providers operate in another member state (Article 30a). Finally, the functioning of ERGA is thoroughly outlined as a body providing technical support, cooperation, and the exchange of experience to the Commission in the field of audiovisual services, all aimed at ensuring the application of the Directive (Article 30b).

As mentioned, the revised *Audiovisual Media Services Directive* is a response to technological advancements that have led to the emergence of new services and facilitated the use of existing media services, altering user behaviors and necessitating their inclusion within regulatory frameworks. This, at least for now, completed the regulation of the audiovisual sector.[7]

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[7] The concept of the audiovisual sector frequently encompasses the film industry, while in other instances it is understood to refer exclusively to audiovisual media, with the film sector being treated as a distinct entity.

Other Regulations on Audiovisual Media

Given that copyright issues in this area were not the subject of regulation under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, it is important to mention that this field is governed by 11 directives and two regulations. These include the analyzed Satellite and Cable Directive and its revised 2019 version, which extended regulations to online broadcasting and adapted copyright rules to the needs of the digital age, including provisions on streaming services (Directive (EU) 2019/789 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 laying down rules on the exercise of copyright and related rights applicable to certain online transmissions of broadcasting organizations and retransmissions of television and radio programs). Also significant in this sector is the film industry, which is closely linked to the audiovisual sector and often considered a part of it. The MEDIA sub-program, operating within Creative Europe, plays a crucial role by supporting the development, promotion, and distribution of European audiovisual works. Additionally, various recommendations by the European Commission are of importance, such as the Recommendation on Film Heritage, which calls for the collection, preservation, and transmission of film heritage to future generations (Recommendation on film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities 2005/865/CE).

A major issue in audiovisual media is the protection of minors. While the Audiovisual Media Services Directive provides for their protection, it is also important to note the European Commission's Recommendation on the Protection of Minors in the Audiovisual Sector (Recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity and on the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and online information services industry, 2006/952/EC). Lastly, among the recommendations related to audiovisual works, the Recommendation on Media Literacy in the Digital Environment should be highlighted, as it outlines the obligations of the media industry to enhance media literacy across the European Union (Recommendation on media literacy in the digital environment for a more competitive audiovisual and content industry and an inclusive knowledge society, 2009/625/EC).

Currently, the most significant set of regulations in the EU concerning the digital environment are the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA). However, these primarily target large online platforms and search engines rather than traditional media, though they may indirectly affect electronic media. The Digital Services Act (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 on a Single Market for Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC) imposes obligations on large platforms that distribute digital content, including content originating from electronic media. Although streaming and video-on-demand (VOD) services are regulated by the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, if they distribute their content via major online platforms (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, X), those platforms must comply with DSA rules on content moderation, advertising transparency, and user protection. On the other hand, the Digital Markets Act (Regulation (EU) 2022/1925 on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and amending Directives (EU) 2019/1937 and

(EU) 2020/1828) applies to major digital companies and search engines (Google, Apple, Meta) and regulates how these platforms manage content from media companies. The DMA regulates algorithm transparency, prevents self-preferential treatment of content from dominant platforms, and promotes fair conditions for all media companies. The importance of this legal framework for EU member states is considerable, as these regulations take the form of EU regulations and are directly applicable without requiring additional national legislation.

Finally, a key regulation for media freedom and pluralism in the European Union is the European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU). This regulation, which is directly applicable in all member states, came into force but will be fully implemented from August 2025. Its provisions relevant to radio and television include ensuring the independence of national regulatory authorities for electronic media, transparency of media ownership to prevent excessive concentration, diversity of content, independence of public service media, and mechanisms for coordination between national regulatory bodies and the European Commission.

The legal instruments governing audiovisual media beyond the Audiovisual Media Services Directive are rather extensive. They include both analyzed regulations, directives and relevant recommendations and other numerous acts in the form of decisions, reports, proposals, and more. Nevertheless, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive remains the most significant binding document for all EU member states. As technology advances and new challenges arise in this field, further revisions of existing documents will likely be required. In its report *ERGA's Views on the Future Priorities for Media Policy* from July 2024, the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services highlights the increasing convergence of traditional and digital media, emphasizing the need for regulatory updates that ensure fair competition and the visibility of European works. ERGA also stresses the importance of adapting the directive to address the role of third-country media providers and evolving content distribution models, which will be crucial for the future development of electronic media in the EU *(ERGA's Views on the Future Priorities for Media Policy* from July 2024).

Conclusion

Due to rapid technological advancements, the legal framework governing electronic media in the European Union has undergone substantial transformations, requiring both the expansion of digital platforms and the necessity for regulatory adaptation. Historically, electronic media regulation was primarily focused on television and radio broadcasting, with several directives, such as the Television Without Frontiers Directive (TWF), laying the foundation for cross-border audiovisual content and setting essential standards for advertising, cultural diversity, and content restrictions. The adoption of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive

(AVMSD) built upon this framework, has extended regulatory oversight to include on-demand services and evolved media formats while maintaining core protections for consumers and broadcasters. Additionally, the Satellite and Cable Directive has introduced further provisions to harmonize copyright regulations across member states and facilitate cross-border retransmission of audiovisual content.

Over time, media consumption patterns have evolved, and regulatory measures have expanded to address new challenges beyond traditional broadcasting. While television and radio remain essential components of the media landscape, digital platforms, streaming services, and social media networks have gained prominence. However, despite the rise of digital media, the TWF and, later, the AVMSD, have remained central in ensuring that traditional broadcasters adhere to EU-wide standards. The AVMSD continues to define obligations for audiovisual media, covering aspects such as advertising, quotas for European audiovisual works, and measures to protect minors, based on the regulatory principles founded by the previous TWF Directive. As the media landscape evolves, these directives have been adapted to maintain regulatory consistency while addressing the growing influence of digital intermediaries. While primarily targeting online platforms, several acts, such as the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act, as well as the European Media Freedom Act which is focused on media freedom and pluralism, have undoubtedly contributed to shaping the evolving media landscape, indirectly impacting traditional media like television and radio through their influence on content distribution, competition, and regulatory oversight.

For traditional broadcasters like TV and radio, the future EU media regulation must proactively address the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies, particularly as they increasingly synchronize with digital platforms. While fostering innovation across the media landscape, it is essential to safeguard fundamental rights, including freedom of expression and access to diverse content. The above-mentioned *ERGA's* report highlights the increasing convergence of traditional and digital media, emphasizing the need for regulatory updates to ensure fair competition and the visibility of European audiovisual works. It also highlights the importance of adapting the AVMSD to address the role of third-country media providers, as well as evolving content distribution models, which will be crucial for the future development of electronic media in the EU. Moreover, as artificial intelligence and data-driven advertising continue to grow, some stronger regulatory oversight is needed to ensure a fair and competitive media landscape that protects both consumers and content creators.

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Razvoj regulative elektronskih medija u Evropskoj uniji

Andrej Blagojević, Docent, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Pravna regulativa elektronskih medija ima ključnu ulogu u oblikovanju raznovrsnog, dostupnog i odgovornog medijskog prostora. U okviru Evropske unije, ovaj regulatorni okvir značajno se razvijao tokom vremena, prateći dinamične promene u medijskom okruženju. Rad istražuje razvoj pravne regulative elektronskih medija u EU, od prvobitne *Direktive o televiziji bez granica* (1989) i *Direktive o satelitskom emitovanju i kablovskom reemitovanju* (1993, revidirane 2019), do njenog savremenog temelja, *Direktive o audiovizuelnim medijskim uslugama* (2010, revidirane 2018). Analiza je prvenstveno usmerena na AVMSD, kao najvažniji pravni akt koji oblikuje medijski prostor EU. Rad takođe ispituje uticaj novijih regulatornih okvira—*Akta o digitalnim uslugama* (2022), *Akta o digitalnim tržištima* (2022) i *Evropskog akta o slobodi medija* (2024). Ovi propisi, iako primarno nisu usmereni na tradicionalne elektronske medije, značajno utiču na njihovo funkcionisanje. Kroz analizu zakonodavnih promena, rad osvetljava stalne napore EU da se prilagodi tehnološkim inovacijama, uspostavi ravnotežu između tržišne konkurencije i medijskih sloboda, te efikasno reguliše digitalne platforme i servise za strimovanje.

Ključne reči: elektronski mediji, regulacija medija, Direktiva o audiovizuelnim medijskim uslugama, Evropska unija.