

APPLIED MEDIA STUDIES JOURNAL



<https://doi.org/10.46630/amsj.1.2026>

Publishing Operations Editor

Maja D. Stojković, PhD

Editor-in chief

Neven Obradović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Editorial board

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dragana Pavlović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Dušan Aleksić, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Marija Vujović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

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

Marta Mitrović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Martina Topić-Rutherford, Associate Professor in PR Leadership, University of Alabama, USA

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

Neven Obradović, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

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

Tatjana Vulić, Department of Communicology and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

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

Technical Secretary

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

University of Nis
Faculty of Philosophy

ISSN 3042-3600

APPLIED MEDIA STUDIES JOURNAL

Vol. VII, No 1, 2026



Niš, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lucija Radić Palinko, Krešimir Dabo, Hrvoje Ratkić SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT IN CROATIAN NATIONAL BALLET ENSEMBLES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS	7
Katarina S. Lazić MEDIA AS MEMORY MAKERS: TELEVISION, FILM AND MUSIC IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF YUGONOSTALGIA ACROSS GENERATIONS	31
Anja Savić, Milica Jović INFORMATION OR MANIPULATION: MEDIA LITERACY AS A CRITICAL COMPETENCE (A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIJSKA PISMENOST PLATFORM)	49
Ilija Milosavljević, Dragana Pavlović VIDEO STREAMING TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE MEDIA ECOSYSTEM OF THE 21ST CENTURY	67
Irina Filipović ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A MEDIUM: ETHICAL AND DISCURSIVE IMPLICATIONS	81

Social Media Management in Croatian National Ballet Ensembles: A Content Analysis¹

Lucija Radić Palinko², Algebra Bernays University, Croatia

Krešimir Dabo^{3,4}, Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Hrvoje Ratkić⁵, VERN' University, Croatia

Abstract

This paper examines how social media shape communication practices, visibility, and brand-building among three Croatian national ballet ensembles: the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split. The framework draws on research on cultural public relations and media relations, social media communication in cultural institutions, theatre-specific communication, and the digital presentation of dance, with a focus on ballet. The study applies quantitative content analysis to 157 Facebook and Instagram posts published over a six-month period. Coding categories include post format, thematic focus, calls to action, interaction type and intensity, and differences in the use of platform tools across ensembles. Findings indicate that social media is pivotal for constructing institutional identity and maintaining audience relationships, yet communication effectiveness varies considerably. The Zagreb ensemble achieves the highest reach and engagement, while Rijeka and Split maintain lower but stable activity. Visual and interactive formats are associated with higher engagement, whereas video content and dialogic practices designed to stimulate discussion remain limited. The article contributes empirical insight into digital communication in cultural institutions and offers implications for improving social media strategies. Limitations include the time-bounded sample, reliance on quantitative indicators, and the absence of audience perception data. Future research should adopt longitudinal and qualitative approaches and expand the analysis to additional platforms.

Keywords: digital communication, social media management, public relations in culture, dance art, ballet

¹ Acknowledgement: This paper was developed as part of the research conducted for the author's master's thesis at Algebra Bernays University in Zagreb, defended in February 2026.

² ORCID: 0009-0008-5373-5074

³ Corresponding author: dabo.kresimir@gmail.com

⁴ ORCID: 0000-0001-9260-7384

⁵ ORCID: 0009-0007-2747-9233

Social Media Management in Croatian National Ballet Ensembles: A Content Analysis

Introduction

Over the past decade, digital transformation has profoundly reshaped the ways in which cultural institutions communicate with their audiences. Social media platforms have become central channels for visibility, interpretation, and public engagement in the cultural sector. These platforms enable institutions to communicate beyond physical and institutional boundaries, offering new opportunities for audience reach, brand-building, and the mediation of cultural value in increasingly competitive media environments.

In the context of culture and the performing arts, social media function not only as promotional tools but also as spaces in which institutional identities are constructed and relationships with audiences are negotiated. Through visual, narrative, and interactive formats, cultural institutions can enhance accessibility, stimulate interest, and foster emotional connections with diverse publics. Consequently, the strategic management of social media has become an integral component of contemporary cultural communication and public relations practice.

Theatre, and ballet in particular, represents a compelling case within digital cultural communication. Due to its strong visual dimension, embodied aesthetics, and symbolic expressiveness, ballet possesses significant communicative potential in digital environments. Social media content such as performance photography, short video excerpts, rehearsal material, and behind-the-scenes insights enables ballet institutions to extend the theatrical experience beyond the stage and engage audiences before and after live performances.

Despite the growing importance of social media in cultural communication, empirical research on how national ballet ensembles strategically use these platforms, and how specific content practices relate to audience engagement, remains limited, particularly in the Croatian context (Chhabra & Chaturvedi, 2022; Gagliano, 2020; John, 2023). Existing studies suggest that cultural institutions often rely on announcement-driven and institution-centered communication, while the dialogic and participatory potential of social media remains underutilized (Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2015; Rodríguez-Veras et al., 2023; Capriotti & Pardo Kuklinski, 2012).

Against this backdrop, the research problem addressed in this study concerns the extent to which Croatian national ballet ensembles use social media strategically, and how different content formats and communication practices are associated with audience engagement on Facebook and Instagram.

The main objective of the study is to analyze and compare the social media communication practices of the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split, with a focus on content formats, thematic orientation, and audience interaction.

More specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which themes and post formats are most frequently used in ballet-related posts published by the Croatian National Theatre institutions in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split on Facebook and Instagram?

RQ2: How do post type, content, and format relate to digital audience engagement (likes, comments, shares, views, and other interactions)?

RQ3: What differences emerge across the three institutions in quantitative indicators of social media management on Facebook and Instagram?

By addressing these questions through quantitative content analysis, the study aims to contribute empirical insight into digital communication practices in national cultural institutions and to identify key opportunities and challenges in the social media management of ballet ensembles.

Theoretical Framework: Public Relations, Social Media, and Digital Communication in Cultural and Performing Arts Institutions

In the context of mass media and ongoing digital transformation, public relations have assumed an increasingly strategic role within the cultural sector. Cultural institutions operate in a media environment shaped by convergence, audience fragmentation, and accelerated digitalization, where communication extends beyond information dissemination to encompass dialogue, interpretation, and meaning-making processes.

Public relations in culture therefore represent a distinct field of communication practice and research in which social values, cultural policies, institutional missions, and audience engagement intersect. Unlike commercially oriented sectors, cultural public relations are embedded in frameworks of public interest, social responsibility, and cultural mediation. As Plenković and Mustić (2020) note, communication practices in cultural institutions contribute not only to institutional visibility but also to the development of broader media and communication culture by mediating relationships between institutions, audiences, and society. Museums, theatres, festivals, and other cultural organizations rely on communication to interpret cultural content, enable participation, and legitimize their social role. Consequently, cultural public relations extend beyond promotional functions and operate as mechanisms for balancing artistic values, audience expectations, and institutional responsibility (Maratova, 2024).

Scholars emphasize that public relations cannot be separated from their cultural context, as culture shapes communication norms, values, and practices (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2012). In cultural institutions this relationship is particularly pronounced because institutional identities and missions are deeply embedded in community-specific cultural frameworks. From a critical perspective, Edwards (2018) notes that public relations in cultural contexts can influence which voices, values, and cultural representations become more visible and legitimate in the public sphere. In a related way, Fitch and Motion (2021) highlight the often-overlooked influence of public relations on popular culture and its potential role in processes of social change.

Within this broader framework, audience development has emerged as a central concept in contemporary cultural communication. Cultural audiences are increasingly understood as active participants rather than passive recipients of artistic content. Research indicates that cultural organizations employ interconnected strategies involving digital technologies, partnerships, education, segmentation, and participatory communication in order to attract, expand, and retain audiences (Saad Alnaser & Jing Li, 2023). Digital tools enable more personalized communication, continuous interaction, and feedback loops, which can strengthen engagement, trust, and long-term audience relationships in the cultural sector (Bračić, 2021).

Empirical studies in Croatia suggest that many cultural institutions still lack fully professionalized public relations structures, despite recognizing the growing importance of systematic digital communication (Gali & Vidak, 2019). The absence of strategically embedded communication practices often results in reactive and fragmented approaches that weaken long-term audience relationships and limit the potential of cultural institutions to engage with contemporary media environments (Gregory, 2010; Zelenika, Grmuša, & Jurišić, 2018). Research on Croatian media coverage of culture further shows that cultural topics rarely receive prominent attention in traditional media and often remain confined to informational or promotional formats, which restricts deeper interpretation and critical engagement (Dabo, 2024).

The rise of digital media and social networking platforms has further transformed the communication environment of cultural institutions. Media systems increasingly function as spaces in which cultural meanings are negotiated, interpreted, and circulated among various actors. Media therefore acts not only as channels of information but also as co-creators of cultural meaning, shaping how artistic content is interpreted and valued in the public sphere (Couldry, 2012). Transparency, accessibility, and continuous communication have consequently become normative expectations in the relationship between cultural institutions and their audiences (Johnston, 2012).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok play a particularly important role in this process by enabling collaboration, community building, and digital identity formation (Imani Rad & Banaeian Far, 2023; John, 2023). From a network perspective, social media operate through interconnected nodes and ties that shape influence, information flows, and the formation of online communities (Bebić & Volarević, 2013; Ali et al., 2021). Such structures are especially relevant for cultural communication because they allow cultural content that may receive limited visibility in traditional media to reach new and diverse audiences (Lipić, Dabo, & Kolić Stanić, 2025).

Within cultural and artistic fields, social media therefore acquire a strategic dimension. Active social media management is associated with stronger visibility, clearer institutional identity, and higher levels of audience engagement (Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2015). At the same time, scholars warn that algorithmic logics and metric-driven evaluation may encourage superficial cultural consumption and shift attention from professional critique toward popularity indicators such as views,

likes, and shares (Ugwu, 2024; Abbing, 2023). Influencers and digital intermediaries further reshape cultural mediation by amplifying the reach of artistic content while simultaneously challenging traditional institutional mechanisms of cultural legitimation (Meng, 2025).

Within the performing arts, dance and ballet provide particularly illustrative cases for examining digital cultural communication. Due to their strong visual aesthetics and embodied forms of expression, dance performances are especially compatible with image-based and video-oriented social media platforms. Digital engagement increasingly serves as an indicator of organizational visibility and sustainability for dance institutions (Ford & Mandviwalla, 2020). Social media expand dance audiences into global networks, creating what Gagliano (2020) describes as a “distributed performance landscape” in which performances are viewed, shared, and reinterpreted across digital environments.

Digital platforms also enable new forms of participation and learning through tutorials, rehearsal materials, and behind-the-scenes content that bring audiences closer to artistic processes (Akram & Kumar, 2017; Zimányi & Lanszki, 2020). At the same time, the growing importance of platform visibility contributes to the emergence of an attention economy in which visually optimized and algorithm-friendly content gains prominence (Lisowski, 2025).

Research on screen dance and digital choreography further highlights the emergence of screen-oriented forms of dance production and participatory audience practices, positioning dance as an audiovisual phenomenon and audiences as co-creators of meaning (Rosenberg, 2012; Bench et al., 2021). In ballet, these dynamics are particularly visible due to the form’s aesthetic precision and its compatibility with platform aesthetics, especially on visually oriented networks such as Instagram (Krajac, 2023; Wulff, 2020).

However, digital visibility also introduces new cultural and aesthetic pressures. Scholars note that social media may intensify expectations related to bodily perfection and self-presentation through a persistent “digital gaze” directed at dancers and performers (Gagliano, 2020; Fitzgerald, 2023). Platforms such as TikTok further accelerate the reinterpretation of ballet through short, repeatable video formats and viral challenges (Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021), while simultaneously opening ballet to more inclusive, participatory, and non-institutional forms of engagement (Morrow, 2019; Abbing, 2023).

Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate why social media management has become a crucial component of contemporary communication strategies in performing arts institutions. Social platforms function simultaneously as promotional channels, spaces of cultural interpretation, and infrastructures for audience development. Understanding how ballet institutions use these digital tools is therefore essential for examining the ways in which visibility, engagement, and institutional identity are constructed in contemporary cultural communication. This perspective directly informs the present study, which analyzes how Croatian national ballet ensembles use Facebook and Instagram as platforms for communicating ballet-related content and engaging with audiences.

Method

In line with the research questions outlined in the introduction, this study applies a quantitative content analysis to examine how Croatian national ballet ensembles manage their social media communication and how specific content characteristics relate to audience engagement. Quantitative content analysis is suitable for systematically and objectively examining publicly available communication content and for identifying patterns in institutional digital practices (Pilar & Lamza Posavec, 2004).

This method enables a structured comparison of observable social media communication practices across institutions and platforms by transforming social media posts into measurable analytical units. Each post represents one unit of analysis and is examined using a predefined coding scheme designed to address the study's research questions.

Specifically, the methodological framework was constructed to:

- identify dominant themes and formats of social media communication (RQ1),
- examine relationships between content characteristics and audience engagement (RQ2),
- compare quantitative indicators of social media management across institutions and platforms (RQ3).

Sample and procedure

The empirical sample consists of all Facebook and Instagram posts related to ballet ensembles published on the official social media profiles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split during a six-month period, from 18 January to 18 July 2025.

Because ballet ensembles do not maintain separate official social media profiles, the analysis focused exclusively on ballet-related content published within the institutional accounts of each theatre. From the total corpus of posts, only those thematically related to ballet were included in the analysis.

The final sample comprises 157 posts, including 95 Facebook posts and 62 Instagram posts. This time frame was selected to capture regular communication patterns during an active theatre season and to allow comparison across platforms and institutions.

All posts were manually coded using a standardized coding matrix. Coding was conducted consistently across platforms to ensure comparability of results.

Measures

A structured coding matrix was used to capture content and engagement characteristics of each post. The coding scheme was developed to operationalize the study's research questions through clearly defined variables. Each measure corresponds to at least one research question, ensuring analytical coherence. A

structured coding matrix was developed to capture key characteristics of social media posts and their engagement outcomes. The coding scheme included variables related to post format (e.g., text combined with images, videos, or external links), thematic orientation of posts (such as event announcements or reports on completed events), and the presence and type of calls to action. Calls to action were coded as direct when posts explicitly encouraged specific actions (e.g., buying tickets, watching content, sharing, or commenting), as indirect when posts contained questions or invitations that implicitly encouraged audience responses without explicit instructions, or as absent when no engagement prompt was present.

In addition, engagement indicators were recorded for each post, including the number of reactions or likes, comments, shares, and video views where available. The coding matrix also captured whether posts contained links directing users to external sources, such as institutional websites, ticketing platforms, media coverage, or partner content. Together, these variables enabled systematic comparison of observable communication practices and engagement patterns across institutions and social media platforms.

This operationalization enables quantification of institutional posting practices and comparative assessment of how specific formats and thematic choices align with engagement outcomes across the three theatres and two platforms. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize distributions of formats, themes, and engagement indicators. Comparative analysis across ensembles and platforms was conducted to identify institutional differences in social media management practices. All analyses were aligned with the research questions to ensure consistency between theoretical objectives and empirical procedures.

Results

The following section presents a systematic overview of the results of the quantitative content analysis, aimed at identifying specific communication practices, post formats, and levels of interaction that characterize the digital activity of the analyzed ballet ensembles.

The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split are active on the social media platform Facebook, as evidenced by the number of likes and followers associated with their official Facebook pages (Table 1).

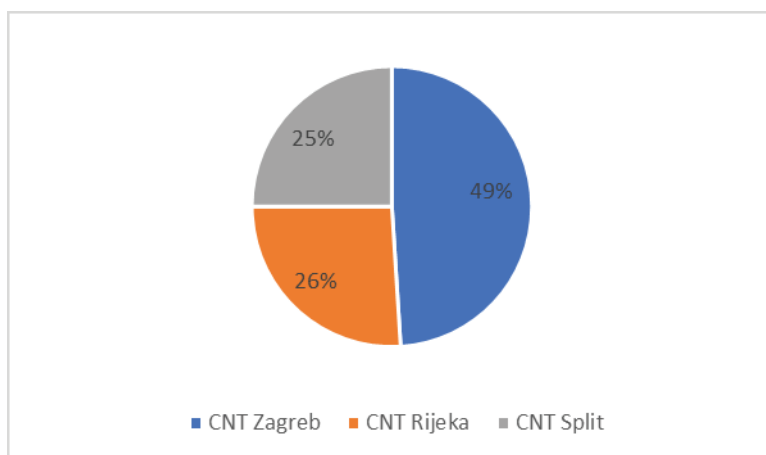
Table 1
Facebook page popularity of Croatian National Theatre institutions

	CNT ZAGREB	CNT SPLIT	CNT RIJEKA
Page Likes	37.000	23.000	15.000
Followers	39.000	24.000	17.000

Table 1 shows differences in the size of Facebook audiences across the analyzed institutions. The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb has the largest follower base, followed by the Croatian National Theatre in Split, while the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka records the smallest audience on this platform.

The Facebook platform is used for digital communication by the ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split, as evidenced by a total of 95 posts published by the three institutions during the observed six-month period. During this time, the Zagreb ensemble published 46 posts on Facebook, the Rijeka ensemble published 25 posts, and the Split ensemble published 24 posts.

Figure 1
Number of posts published by the ensembles on Facebook



The data presented in Figure 1 indicate that, out of the total number of Facebook posts, the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb accounted for 49%, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka for 26%, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split for 25%.

The following sections present a segmented interpretation of the results obtained from the analysis of ballet ensemble communication during the period from 18 January to 18 July 2025. The analysis first focuses on post format. Regarding post formats on Facebook, the analyzed ballet ensembles used text combined with images, text combined with video, and text combined with links to media content. The distribution of these formats across the analyzed ballet ensembles is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Comparative overview of Facebook post formats

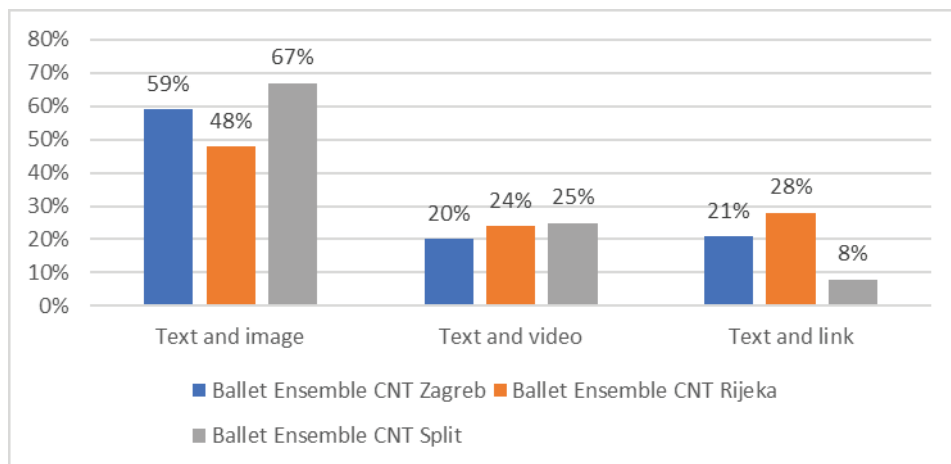


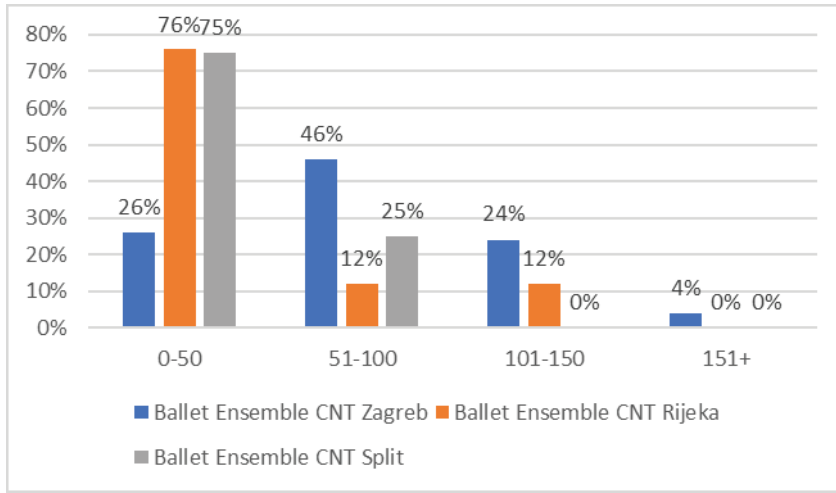
Figure 2 presents the distribution of post formats used on the Facebook pages of the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split during the observed period. Across all three ensembles, posts combining text and images clearly predominate, highlighting the central role of visual communication in social media practices. Although this format is dominant in all cases, its prevalence varies somewhat across institutions, suggesting different emphasis in the use of visual content for audience communication.

Video-based posts appear less frequently but are used at relatively comparable levels across the three ensembles, indicating a shared recognition of the communicative potential of video content on social media platforms. By contrast, posts containing external links are the least common format overall and appear more frequently in the Rijeka ensemble's communication, while the Split ensemble relies on this format only marginally.

Overall, the figure indicates differences in the relative emphasis placed on particular post formats across the three institutions, while confirming the dominant role of visually oriented content in the digital communication of ballet ensembles on Facebook.

Figure 3 compares the number of likes received by the ballet ensembles on Facebook.

Figure 3
Comparative overview of the number of likes on Facebook posts



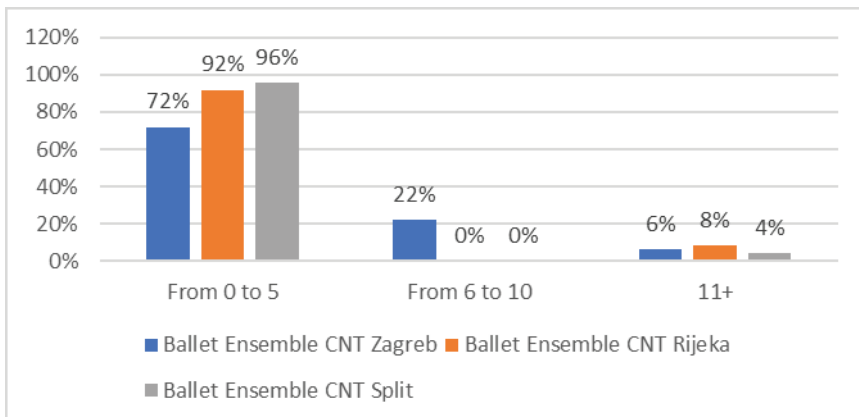
As shown in Figure 3, most posts published by the Rijeka and Split ensembles fall into the lowest engagement range, indicating relatively modest audience interaction on Facebook. In contrast, posts from the Zagreb ensemble appear more frequently in higher engagement categories, suggesting stronger audience response on this platform.

While Rijeka and Split posts are largely concentrated in lower engagement ranges, the Zagreb ensemble records a more balanced distribution that includes a noticeable share of posts achieving higher numbers of likes.

Overall, the pattern indicates that the Zagreb ballet ensemble tends to generate higher levels of audience engagement on Facebook compared with the other two institutions, whose posts are predominantly associated with lower engagement levels.

Figure 4 presents a comparative overview of the number of comments on Facebook posts.

Figure 4
Comparative overview of the number of comments on Facebook posts



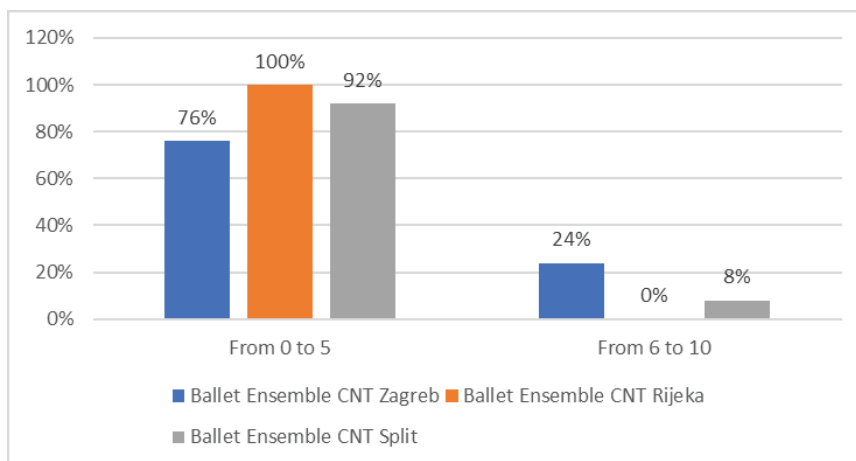
As shown in Figure 4, most posts across all three ensembles fall into the lowest comment category, indicating generally low levels of audience interaction through commenting on Facebook. This pattern is particularly evident for the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whose posts are largely concentrated in the lowest engagement range.

By contrast, the Zagreb ensemble appears more frequently in higher comment categories, suggesting a comparatively stronger level of audience interaction on this platform.

Overall, the results indicate that commenting activity remains limited across all ensembles, although the Zagreb ballet ensemble shows somewhat greater potential to stimulate audience responses.

A comparative overview of the number of shares of Facebook posts is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Comparative overview of the number of shares of Facebook posts



The figure shows that Facebook posts by the ballet ensembles in Rijeka, Split, and Zagreb generate very low levels of sharing. Most posts across all ensembles fall into the lowest category (0-5 shares), indicating limited organic reach. This trend is most pronounced for the Rijeka ensemble, where all posts (100%) remain within this category, followed by Split with 92%, suggesting that content rarely circulates beyond core audiences and is insufficiently engaging to prompt sharing.

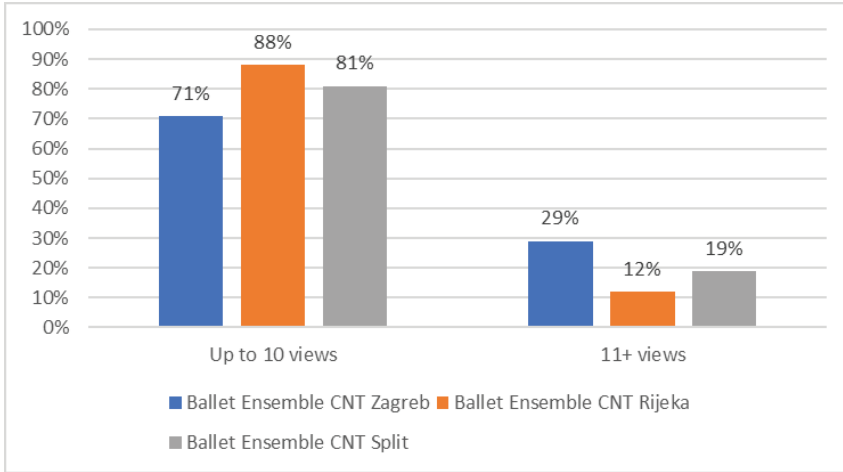
The Zagreb ensemble performs slightly better, although 76% of its posts also remain in the lowest category. Notably, however, 24% of Zagreb's posts reach the next range (6–10 shares), indicating occasional success in extending reach, possibly due to more effective content selection, stronger visual presentation, higher recognizability, or more active communication strategies.

By contrast, only 8% of Split's posts fall into the 6-10 shares category, while Rijeka records none. This distribution suggests that the Rijeka and Split ensembles are less effective in motivating audiences to share content, potentially due to smaller follower bases, weaker sharing habits, or a lack of interactive and innovative content.

Figure 6 presents a comparative overview of the number of video views on Facebook.

Figure 6

Comparative overview of the number of video views on Facebook



As shown in Figure 6, most video posts published by the analyzed ballet ensembles fall into the lowest view category, indicating generally low levels of audience reach on Facebook. This pattern is particularly pronounced for the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whose videos are predominantly concentrated in the lowest engagement range.

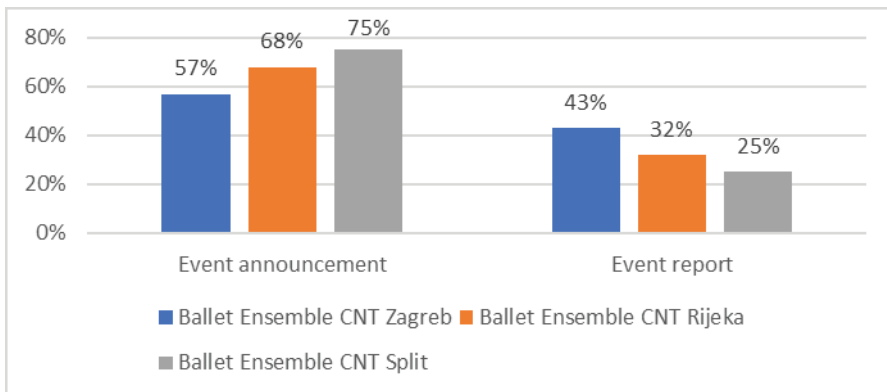
The Zagreb ensemble appears somewhat more frequently in higher view categories, suggesting comparatively greater video visibility on this platform.

Overall, the results indicate that video content generates relatively modest engagement across all three ensembles.

A comparative overview of post themes used by the ballet ensembles on Facebook is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Comparative overview of post themes on Facebook



As shown in Figure 7, event announcements clearly dominate as the primary thematic focus of posts across all analyzed ballet ensembles. Posts reporting on completed events appear considerably less frequently, indicating that social media communication is primarily oriented toward promoting upcoming performances and activities.

Although all ensembles follow this general pattern, the Zagreb ensemble shows a somewhat higher presence of post-event content compared with Rijeka and Split.

Overall, the results suggest that social media platforms are used predominantly as channels for event promotion rather than for post-event communication.

Figure 8 presents online engagement indicators, namely calls to like, share, comment, and similar forms of interaction, on Facebook posts published by ballet ensembles.

Figure 8
Comparative overview of online engagement in Facebook posts

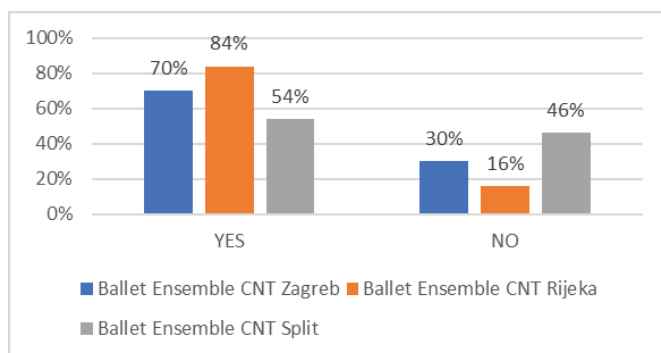


Figure 8 shows the extent to which the analyzed ballet ensembles include calls to action encouraging audience interaction on Facebook. Most posts across all three ensembles contain some form of engagement prompt, indicating that inviting audience interaction is a common communication practice.

However, differences emerge across institutions. Engagement prompts appear more consistently in posts published by the Rijeka and Zagreb ensembles, whereas such elements occur less frequently in the communication of the Split ensemble.

Overall, the results indicate that encouraging audience interaction through calls to action is a widely used practice, although its consistency varies across the analyzed institutions.

The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split are active on the social media platform Instagram, as evidenced by the number of posts, followers, and accounts followed (Table 2).

Table 2
Number of posts, followers, and accounts followed on Instagram

	CNT ZAGREB	CNT SPLIT	CNT RIJEKA
Posts	2.373	3.436	640
Followers	14.300	5.918	8.393
Following	2.932	2.509	317

Table 2 presents a comparative overview of the activity and reach of the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split on Instagram, based on three indicators: number of posts, number of followers, and number of accounts followed.

All ensembles are active on Instagram, although with notable differences in intensity and effectiveness. Table 2 presents differences in Instagram activity and audience size among the analyzed institutions. The Rijeka theatre account records the highest total number of posts, followed by Zagreb, while the Split account shows substantially lower overall posting activity. However, the largest follower base is associated with the Zagreb theatre account, followed by Split, whereas Rijeka has the smallest number of followers despite its higher overall posting volume. This imbalance suggests that higher content volume does not necessarily translate into greater reach and may point to differences in content quality, audience targeting, or institutional visibility.

Regarding networking practices, CNT Zagreb and CNT Rijeka follow many other accounts (2,932 and 2,509, respectively), which may reflect strategies of visibility building and interaction within cultural networks. CNT Split, by comparison, follows substantially fewer accounts (317), indicating a more selective or less network-oriented approach.

During the observed period (18 January-18 July 2020), the CNT Zagreb ensemble published 25 posts, CNT Rijeka 18 posts, and CNT Split 19 posts.

Figure 9 presents a comparison of post formats on the social media platform Facebook.

Figure 9
Comparative overview of post formats on Instagram

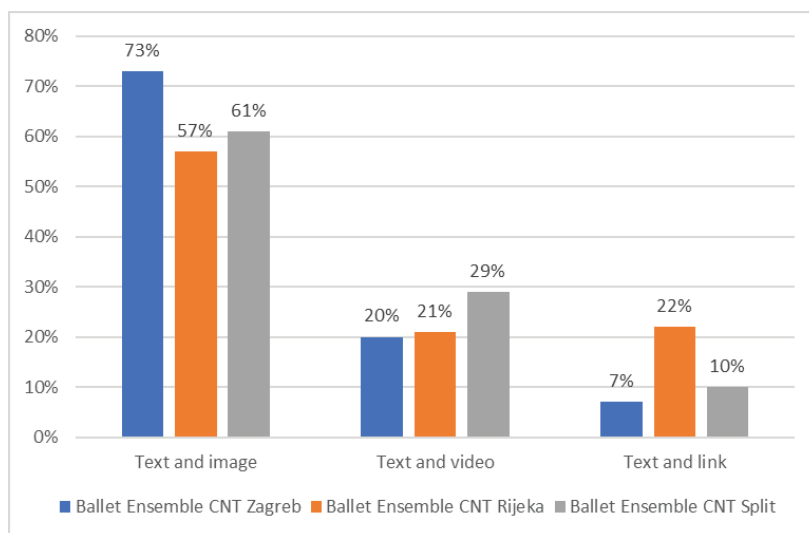


Figure 9 presents a comparative overview of post formats used by the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split on Instagram.

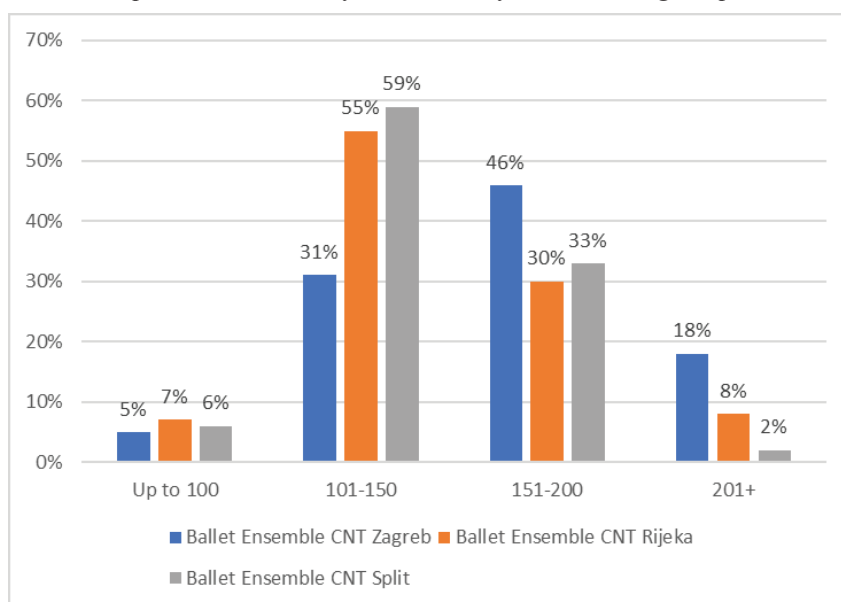
Across all ensembles, posts combining text and images clearly predominate, highlighting the central role of visual communication on this platform.

Video-based posts appear less frequently but are present across all three ensembles, indicating that video is used as an additional format for presenting ballet-related content on Instagram. By contrast, posts containing external links are the least common format overall and appear somewhat more frequently in the communication of the Rijeka ensemble.

Overall, the figure confirms the dominant role of visually oriented content in Instagram communication, while also revealing minor differences in the relative emphasis placed on video and external linking across the analyzed institutions.

Figure 10 presents a comparative analysis of the number of likes on Instagram posts.

Figure 10
Comparative overview of the number of likes on Instagram posts



Across all ensembles, only a small share of posts receives fewer than 100 likes, indicating that most content surpasses this basic engagement threshold (Zagreb 5%, Rijeka 7%, Split 6%). This suggests that all ensembles consistently reach their core audiences and maintain a baseline level of attention.

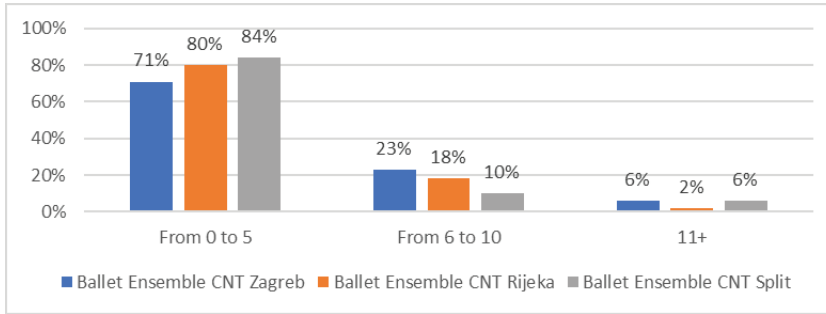
For the Rijeka and Split ensembles, the most common engagement range is 101–150 likes, accounting for 55% and 59% of posts, respectively. In contrast, Zagreb records a lower share in this category (31%), reflecting greater variability and higher overall engagement.

Zagreb clearly dominates the higher engagement ranges, while posts from the Rijeka and Split ensembles appear far less frequently in these categories. This pattern suggests that the Zagreb ensemble achieves consistently stronger audience engagement on Instagram. Overall, these results indicate that the Zagreb ballet

ensemble achieves both more consistent and higher peak engagement on Instagram, whereas Rijeka and Split tend to cluster around moderate engagement levels.

Figure 11 presents a comparative overview of the number of comments on Instagram posts.

Figure 11
Comparative overview of the number of comments on Instagram posts



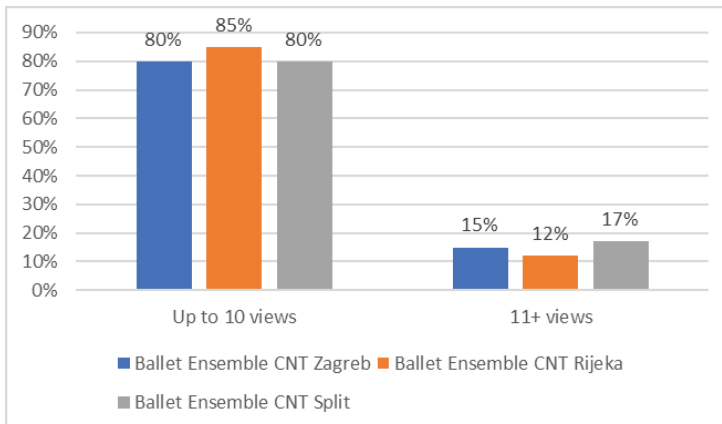
As shown in Figure 11, most posts across all analyzed ensembles fall into the lowest comment category, indicating generally low levels of audience discussion on Instagram. This pattern is particularly evident for the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whose posts are largely concentrated in the lowest engagement range.

The Zagreb ensemble appears somewhat more frequently in higher comment categories, suggesting comparatively stronger audience interaction through commenting.

Overall, the results indicate that commenting activity remains limited across all ensembles, although the Zagreb ballet ensemble shows slightly higher levels of audience response on this platform.

Figure 12 presents a comparative overview of the number of video views on Instagram.

Figure 12
Comparative overview of the number of video views on Facebook

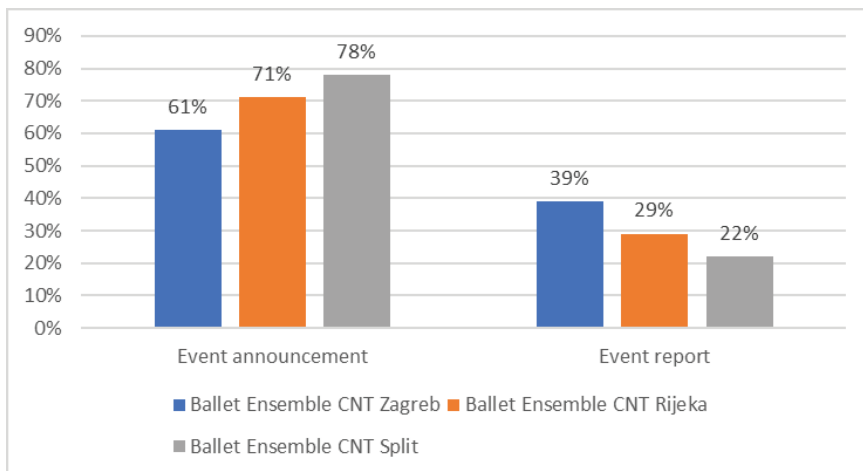


Most videos published by all ensembles receive very low numbers of views, with this pattern most pronounced in the Rijeka ensemble, where 85% of videos do not exceed ten views. Similarly high proportions are observed in Zagreb and Split (80% each), indicating that video content rarely reaches broader audiences and is primarily consumed by the most loyal followers.

Videos with more than 11 views constitute a much smaller share. Split records the highest proportion in this category (17%), followed by Zagreb (15%) and Rijeka (12%), suggesting that only a limited number of videos occasionally generate increased interest, potentially due to special events, appealing themes, or more effective production and promotion.

Overall, these findings highlight challenges in the visibility of video content. They may reflect insufficient promotion strategies, content formats that are not fully aligned with Instagram's preference for short and dynamic videos, or institutional constraints related to adapting classical presentation styles to platform-specific expectations.

Figure 13
Comparative overview of post themes on Instagram



Across all ensembles, event announcements constitute the dominant post theme. This approach is most pronounced in the Split ensemble (78%), followed by Rijeka (71%), while Zagreb relies on announcements to a slightly lesser extent (61%). These findings indicate that ballet ensembles primarily use Instagram as a tool for direct program promotion, aimed at attracting audiences and stimulating interest in upcoming performances and activities.

Event reports are considerably less frequent, particularly in Split (22%), compared with Rijeka (29%) and Zagreb, which places greater emphasis on reflective content (39%). By documenting completed events, the Zagreb ensemble extends communication beyond promotion, potentially fostering a stronger sense of community, transparency, and sustained audience relationships.

Overall, the thematic distribution reveals a predominantly promotional orientation across all ensembles, with reporting content remaining secondary. While effective for audience mobilization, this approach also highlights opportunities to strengthen two-way communication and long-term audience engagement through increased use of post-event reporting. Figure 14 presents a comparative overview of engagement levels in Instagram posts.

Figure 14
Comparative overview of post themes on Instagram

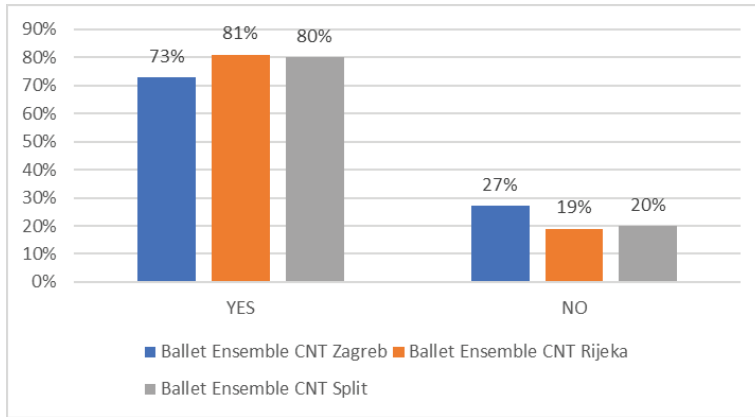


Figure 14 shows the extent to which the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split encourage audience interaction on Instagram through explicit calls to like, share, comment, or otherwise engage.

Most posts across all ensembles include some form of engagement prompt, with the highest proportions recorded for Rijeka (81%) and Split (80%), followed by Zagreb (73%). This indicates a strong overall awareness of the importance of active audience involvement in digital communication.

Posts without calls to engagement are least frequent in Rijeka (19%) and Split (20%), while Zagreb records a higher share of such posts (27%). This suggests that engagement strategies are applied more consistently by the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whereas the Zagreb ensemble, despite generally strong performance, retains a larger proportion of communicatively passive content.

Overall, the findings confirm that encouraging audience interaction is a widely adopted practice among the analyzed ensembles and represents a key component of effective Instagram communication in cultural institutions. Rijeka and Split demonstrate the most systematic application of this strategy, while Zagreb shows further potential to enhance engagement through more consistent use of interaction prompts.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how Croatian national ballet ensembles manage their social media presence and how specific communication practices relate to audience engagement on Facebook and Instagram. The findings provide insight into how digital communication practices in ballet institutions reflect broader theoretical perspectives on cultural public relations, digital communication, and audience development.

From the perspective of cultural public relations, social media function as key communication channels through which cultural institutions promote programs, construct institutional visibility, and maintain relationships with audiences. The dominance of promotional and announcement-oriented posts observed in this study illustrates the continuing role of public relations in communicating cultural programs and informing audiences about upcoming performances. At the same time, engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and shares demonstrate how digital platforms create opportunities for audience interaction, which aligns with theoretical approaches that conceptualize social media as participatory communication environments within the cultural sector.

Findings related to RQ1 indicate a clear dominance of event announcements and visually oriented formats across all ensembles and platforms. This pattern supports earlier research suggesting that cultural institutions frequently use social media primarily as promotional channels rather than as spaces for dialogue or co-creation with audiences (Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2015; Chhabra & Chaturvedi, 2022). The prevalence of image-based posts, particularly on Instagram, is also consistent with theoretical arguments regarding the strong visual compatibility between dance, ballet, and image-centered social media platforms (Gagliano, 2020; Krajac, 2023). Ballet performances rely heavily on visual aesthetics and embodied expression, which makes photographic representation a particularly suitable format for communicating this art form in digital environments.

At the same time, the relatively small share of posts reporting on completed events suggests that communication is primarily oriented toward promoting upcoming performances rather than extending audience interaction after the event has taken place. This indicates that the dialogic potential of social media, frequently emphasized in digital communication theory, is only partially realized in the observed communication practices. Such findings correspond with previous research showing that cultural institutions often maintain predominantly one-directional communication patterns even when using interactive digital platforms (Edwards, 2018; Rodríguez-Veras et al., 2023).

In relation to RQ2, the analysis shows that visually oriented formats, particularly posts combining text and images, are associated with higher engagement levels. This result is consistent with broader research on social media communication, which emphasizes the importance of visual content for attracting audience attention and encouraging interaction in digital environments. In contrast, video posts in this study

generated relatively modest engagement levels. Although video formats are often considered effective tools for stimulating interaction on social media platforms (Ford & Mandviwalla, 2020), the present findings suggest that the use of video format alone does not necessarily guarantee stronger audience response in the context of ballet communication. One possible explanation is that engagement with video content may depend not only on format but also on factors such as platform algorithms, distribution mechanisms, and audience expectations regarding cultural content (Abbing, 2023; Ugwu, 2024).

The results further indicate that the presence of calls to action does not automatically lead to higher levels of audience interaction. While many posts include prompts encouraging users to like, comment, or share content, engagement levels vary considerably across institutions and platforms. This finding suggests that formal engagement prompts alone may be insufficient to stimulate audience participation and that audience interaction is likely influenced by a broader combination of factors, including institutional visibility, audience size, and communication practices.

Addressing RQ3, the analysis reveals notable institutional differences in social media engagement patterns. The Zagreb ballet ensemble consistently records higher engagement levels than the Rijeka and Split ensembles. This difference may partly reflect the stronger institutional recognition and visibility of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb within the national cultural landscape. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that higher posting frequency does not necessarily translate into higher audience engagement. This observation supports earlier research emphasizing that effective digital communication depends not only on the volume of content but also on its relevance and its alignment with audience expectations (Meerman Scott, 2011; Bahunjić & Dabo, 2020).

Taken together, these findings illustrate a broader tension between promotional communication practices and the participatory possibilities offered by digital media. While Croatian national ballet ensembles clearly recognize the importance of maintaining an active social media presence, their communication practices remain largely oriented toward informing audiences about upcoming events rather than fostering sustained dialogue and interaction. This suggests that social media within these institutions currently function primarily as extensions of traditional public relations activities rather than fully developed platforms for participatory cultural communication (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2012; Fitch & Motion, 2021).

The study is based on a six-month analytical period and relies on quantitative engagement indicators, which provides a focused overview of institutional communication practices but does not capture longer-term trends or audience perceptions. Future research could therefore adopt longitudinal and qualitative approaches, including interviews with communication managers or audience surveys, in order to better understand the strategic intentions behind social media communication and the ways in which audiences interpret and respond to ballet-related content online.

Overall, the study highlights the growing importance of social media as communication infrastructures within the performing arts sector. By examining how

ballet institutions use Facebook and Instagram to communicate with audiences, the research contributes to a better understanding of digital cultural communication practices and identifies opportunities for developing more dialogic and audience-oriented social media strategies in the cultural sector.

References

- Abbing, H. (2023). *The economies of serious and popular art: How they diverged and reunited*. Springer Nature Switzerland / Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-18648-6>
- Abidin, C., Zeng, J., & Schäfer, M. S. (2021). Research perspectives on TikTok and its legacy apps: Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 3161–3172. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/14539/3494>
- Akram, W., & Kumar, R. (2017). A study on positive and negative effects of social media on society. *International Journal of Computer Sciences and Engineering*, 5(10), 351–354. <https://doi.org/10.26438/ijcse/v5i10.351354>
- Bahonjić, M., & Dabo, K. (2020). Social media management in cultural entrepreneurship: The case of the Museum of Broken Relationships. *Education for Entrepreneurship – E4E*, 10(1), 40–53. <https://doi.org/10.38190/oep.10.1.7>
- Bebić, D., & Volarević, M. (2013). Social networks as a source of news in Croatian prime-time television newscasts. *Media Studies*, 4(8), 60–74.
- Bench, H., Christa, G., Guadarrama, Y., Hagan, C., Hargraves, K., & Hayes, M. (2021). Screendance festivals and online audiences. *The International Journal of Screendance*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.18061/ijsd.v12i0.8372>
- Bračić, M. (2021). Marketing and public relations of the Croatian School Museum. *Analiza povijest odgoja*, 19(43), 149–162.
- Capriotti, P., & Pardo Kuklinski, H. (2012). Assessing dialogic communication through the Internet in Spanish museums. *Public Relations Review*, 38(4), 619–626. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.05.005>
- Chhabra, N. K., & Chaturvedi, D. D. (2022). Use of social media in arts marketing: A literature review. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 3(1), 559–565. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i1.2022.1746>
- Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. Wiley.
- Dabo, K. (2024). Is there space for cultural heritage, traditional culture, and folklore in Croatian traditional media? *Studia Ethnologica Croatica*, 36(1), 267–286. <https://doi.org/10.17234/SEC.36.13>
- Edwards, L. (2018). *Understanding public relations: Theory, culture and society*. SAGE.
- Fitch, K., & Motion, J. (2021). *Popular culture and social change: The hidden work of public relations*. Routledge.
- Fitzgerald, P. M. (2023). *Turning point: The lived experience of embodied occupational identity in professional ballet dancers* (Doctoral dissertation). Birkbeck, University of London.

- Ford, V., & Mandviwalla, M. (2020). Can digital engagement transform the performing arts? In T. X. Bui (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 53rd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (pp. 4296–4305). University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/64268>
- Gagliano, A. L. (2020). Digital media marketing for dance: Enhancing audience engagement with ballet companies and concert dance performance. *UF Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 22, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.32473/ufjur.v22i0.121994>
- Gali, S., & Vidak, I. (2019). Public relations in cultural institutions: The case of theatres. *Proceedings of Međimurje Polytechnic in Čakovec*, 10(1), 39–49.
- Gregory, A. (2010). *Planning and managing public relations campaigns* (3rd ed.). Kogan Page.
- Imani Rad, A., & Banaeian Far, S. (2023). SocialFi transforms social media: An overview of key technologies, challenges, and opportunities. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 13(1), 42. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-023-01050-7>
- John, R. (2023). Museum communication and contemporary challenges: Communication practices of Croatian museums during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Suvremeni Mediteran*, 2(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.17818/SM/2023/1.1>
- Johnston, J. (2012). *Media relations: Issues & strategies*. Allen & Unwin.
- Krajac, M. (2023). A process and a frame: Ballet on Instagram and a sense of the world. *Body, Space & Technology*, 22(1), 82–99. <https://doi.org/10.16995/bst.9718>
- Lipić, M., Dabo, K., & Kolić Stanić, M. (2025). Contemporary representation of traditional culture on TikTok. *Ethnologica Dalmatica*, 32, 9–40.
- Lisowski, L. (2025). *Dancing in the digital age: How social media shapes the commercial dance industry* (Master's thesis). Pace University.
- Maratova, N. (2024). Public relations in the arts, leisure and entertainment fields (UK experience). *European Journal of Learning on History and Social Sciences*, 1(2), 26–30.
- Meerman Scott, D. (2011). *Real-time marketing and PR*. Dva i dva.
- Meng, B. (2025). *The impact of social media influencers on contemporary art trends: A comprehensive analysis* (Master's thesis). Sotheby's Institute of Art.
- Morrow, S. (2019). *Self-presentation by young ballet and contemporary dancers on image-based social media* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Leeds.
- Pilar, I., & Lamza Posavec, V. (2004). *Methods of social research*. Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar.
- Plenković, M., & Mustić, D. (2020). Paradigmatic reflections on media culture and public relations. *Informatologia*, 53(1–2), 53–91. <https://doi.org/10.32914/i.53.1-2.5>
- Rodríguez-Veras, A. del P., de las Heras-Pedrosa, C., & Lugo-Ocando, J. (2023). Exploring the role of public relations and communication in museums: A science mapping analysis. *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, 13(25), 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.5783/revrrpp.v13i25.810>
- Rosenberg, D. (2012). *Screendance: Inscribing the ephemeral image*. Oxford University Press.
- Sriramesh, K., & Verčič, D. (2012). *Culture and public relations*. Routledge.

- Ugwu, J. N. (2024). The impact of social media on art consumption and critique. *Research Output Journal of Education*, 3(2), 49–52.
- Vassiliadis, C. A., & Belenioti, Z. (2015). Museums and cultural heritage via social media: An integrated literature review. *Tourismos*, 12(3), 97–132.
- Zelenika, K., Grmuša, T., & Jurišić, J. (2018). Strategic planning and public relations in culture: The case of the Gavella Drama Theatre. *Media Studies*, 9(18), 81–105.
- Zimányi, G., & Lanszki, A. (2020). The influence of social media on hip-hop dancers and their classes. *Dance and Education*, 1(1), 97–112. <https://doi.org/10.46819/TN.1.1.80-96>

Upravljanje društvenim mrežama u hrvatskim nacionalnim baletskim ansamblima: analiza sadržaja

Lucija Radić Palinko, Univerzitet Algebra Bernays, Hrvatska
Krešimir Dabo, Fakultet hrvatskih studija Univerziteta u Zagrebu, Hrvatska
Hrvoje Ratkić, Univerzitet VERN, Hrvatska

Sažetak

Ovaj rad ispituje na koji način društvene mreže oblikuju komunikacione prakse, vidljivost i izgradnju brenda triju hrvatskih nacionalnih baletskih ansambala: Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta u Zagrebu, Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta Ivana pl. Zajca u Rijeci i Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta u Splitu. Teorijski okvir rada zasniva se na istraživanjima odnosa s javnošću i odnosa s medijima u kulturi, komunikaciji kulturnih institucija na društvenim mrežama, specifičnostima pozorišne komunikacije, kao i digitalnom predstavljanju plesne umetnosti, s posebnim naglaskom na balet. Istraživanje primenjuje kvantitativnu analizu sadržaja 157 objava objavljenih na Facebooku i Instagramu tokom šestomesečnog perioda. Kategorije analize obuhvataju format objava, tematski fokus, prisustvo poziva na akciju, vrstu i intenzitet interakcija, kao i razlike u korišćenju platformskih alata među ansamblima. Rezultati pokazuju da društvene mreže imaju ključnu ulogu u izgradnji institucionalnog identiteta i održavanju odnosa s publikom, ali da se komunikaciona efikasnost značajno razlikuje. Ansambl iz Zagreba ostvaruje najveći doseg i angažman publike, dok Rijeka i Split beleže niže, ali stabilne nivoe aktivnosti. Vizuelni i interaktivni formati povezani su s višim nivoima angažmana, dok su video-sadržaji i dijaloške prakse usmerene ka podsticanju rasprave i dalje ograničene. Rad doprinosi empirijskom razumevanju digitalne komunikacije u kulturnim institucijama i nudi smernice za unapređenje strategija na društvenim mrežama. Ograničenja istraživanja odnose se na vremenski ograničen uzorak, oslanjanje na kvantitativne pokazatelje i izostanak analize percepcija publike. Buduća istraživanja trebalo bi da uključe longitudinalne i kvalitativne pristupe, kao i proširenje analize na dodatne digitalne platforme.

Ključne reči: digitalna komunikacija, upravljanje društvenim mrežama, odnosi s javnošću u kulturi, plesna umetnost, balet

Received: 3rd February 2026

Revision received: 11th March 2026

Accepted: 11th March 2026

Media as Memory Makers: Television, Film and Music in the Construction of Yugonostalgia Across Generations¹²

Katarina S. Lazić³⁴, Faculty of Philology and Arts, University of Kragujevac, Serbia

Abstract

The topic of our paper will primarily be the role of media (films, TV shows, music) in conjuring (Yugo)nostalgia in the former citizens of Yugoslavia and, vicariously, in their descendants, although they might not have been born during the existence of Yugoslavia. Consequently, the media proves to be of enormous importance in creating not only a form of shared, cross-cultural memory of the former citizens, but a sort of cross-generational memory, providing an opportunity to the younger generations to see what living in Yugoslavia looked like. The corpus for our research will consist of the selected examples from the Yugoslav films and entertainment programs which still present a part of some television programs, as well as certain radio stations which specifically broadcast music from the former Yugoslavia. The analysis will try to reach the conclusion that the video or auditory content might represent a powerful tool in arousing pleasant, or unpleasant emotions in their potential consumers, or in bridging the cross-cultural, or cross-generational gap.

Keywords: media, Yugonostalgia, films, music, memory

Media as Memory Makers: Television, Film and Music in the Construction of Yugonostalgia Across Generations

Introduction

In the context of our paper, it is important to talk about nostalgia. The very term nostalgia originated in the 17th century and was coined by a Swiss physician Johannes Hofer. Namely, in his dissertation entitled *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia* (Hofer, 1688), he coined the term “nostalgia” merging two words of Greek origin:

¹ The research conducted in the paper was funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia (Agreement on the Transfer of Funds for Financing Scientific Research Work of Researchers at Accredited Higher Education Institutions in 2026, number: 451-03-33/2026-03/200198.

² This paper was presented at the International Scientific Conference *Media and Challenges of the Modern Society*, held on May 30-31, 2024, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.

³ Corresponding author: katarina.lazic@filum.kg.ac.rs

⁴ ORCID: 0009-0002-5510-4547

nostos (“the return to home”) and *algia/algos* (“pain”/“suffering”). The term nostalgia was employed in order to describe the pain that originates from one’s desire to return home. Nostalgia was initially applied in the cases of the soldiers going to wars: they felt a strong desire to return to their homes (which in some cases was tantamount to real, physical illness), but were not able to (moreover, the majority of them actually never saw their homes again). The term was later broadened so as to describe the condition of a man in the western modernity, no longer being qualified as a disease (Mijić, 2017). Mitja Velikonja states that:

“Nostalgia always appears when history ‘accelerates its pace’ and ‘shows its teeth’, so it is inevitable, although deliberately concealed, companion of modernization and progressivist ideologies, as well as of dynamic and dramatic periods following the destruction of the old world when we still wait for the new one to be constructed. Therefore, nostalgia dwells in an interspace between ‘no longer’ and ‘not yet’” (Velikonja, 2013: 112).

Consequently, nostalgia originates when a radical discontinuity in people’s lives takes place, a “shock” that has to be overcome in a certain way or, as Mijić states, “when the feeling of discontinuity prevails, a space for nostalgia opens, i.e., longing for the past which from the given perspective looks safe, stable and predictable⁵⁶” (Mijić, 2012: 11). Routledge et al., according to van Tilburg and Igou, state that “nostalgic reverie instills meaningfulness and protects the self against existential threat” (van Tilburg and Igou, 2013: 3). Routledge et al. further state “nostalgia, set off by aversive conditions including existential threats, constitutes a source of meaning” (van Tilburg and Igou, 2013: 6). Wildschut et al. support this claim stating that “the negative affect is widely considered to be an important trigger of nostalgia” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 993). Nostalgia, according to Routledge et al., “increases perceived meaning in life. Moreover, when perceived meaning in life is challenged, individuals become more nostalgic” (van Tilburg and Igou, 2013: 21). Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, many people found themselves facing an existential crisis since the world as they knew it suddenly fell apart. Consequently, they were in need of a narrative that would help them find meaning and continue with their lives. Davis, according to Wildschut et al., argues that “nostalgia occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, and uncertainties” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 993). Yugonostalgia, namely that reverie of “a utopian country”, arose as a means of people’s “psychological survival” in a new, post-socialist climate.

The phenomenon of Yugonostalgia

The dissolution of Yugoslavia was followed by the inter-ethnic wars during the period of the 1990s, the bad economic situation, democracy that ensued after the 2000s, etc. The things mentioned represent a certain *mise-en-scène* for the (Yugo)

⁵ All the translations in the paper have been done by the author of the paper.

⁶ „Kada osećaj diskontinuiteta prevlada, otvara se prostor za nostalgiju, odnosno čežnju za prošlošću koja iz te perspektive izgleda sigurno, stabilno i predvidivo“ (Mijić, 2012: 117).

nostalgia to appear in the former citizens of Yugoslavia. Mijić, in her paper, provides the following definition of Yugonostalgia:

“From my point of view, Yugonostalgia represents a meta-term which encompasses public rituals, exhibitions, media representations, personal and collective nostalgias, mythology of the golden Yugoslav past, brotherhood and unity, Titostalgia, Yustalgia and, in general, nostalgia for the shared identity and values of the former SFRY and popular Yugoslav culture (music and motion pictures from that period of time)” (Mijić, 2017: 188-189).

In the reminiscences of the majority of the former Yugoslavs, Yugoslavia is depicted as a country of “the good standard of living, high employment and income opportunity as well as job security”⁸ (Spasić, 2012: 583). All things considered, it is no wonder that, in the scenery that looked quite the opposite of what the attributes of Yugoslavia used to be, former Yugoslavs felt nostalgic for “the life as they knew it”. According to Spasić, “SFRY”⁹, even today, functions for the common people as a model of normal life. Twenty years after the launching of the ‘changes’, that’s how the things are, since the period of transformations did not give birth to any new, alternative model, an ideal worthy of being striven to¹⁰” (Spasić, 2012: 581). Velikonja emphasizes the so-called “emancipatory potential” of Yugonostalgia whose first aspect is the “criticism of the present state of affairs” (Velikonja, 2013: 121). According to this emancipatory aspect of nostalgia “the assumingly superior past is recollected primarily to be able to criticize the inferiority of the present” (Velikonja, 2013: 121). Davis, according to Palmberger, likewise states that “the act of comparing is inherent to nostalgia, since it always forms a reaction to the present state” (Palmberger, 2008:358). Mijić argues that “through the glorification of the socialist period those who are Yugonostalgic give a critical image of the present and the system that leads them to the future¹¹” (Mijić, 2012: 123). According to Mijić, “the positive evaluation of the socialist period is further strengthened by a critical view of the current socioeconomic situation in the country¹²” (Mijić, 2012: 130). However,

⁷ „Jugonostalgija, po mom mišljenju, predstavlja meta-termin koji obuhvata javne rituale, izložbe, medijske reprezentacije, lične i kolektivne nostalgije, mitologiju o zlatnoj jugoslovenskoj prošlosti, bratstvu i jedinstvu, titostalgiju, yustalgiju i uopšte nostalgiju za deljenim identitetom i vrednostima bivše SFRJ i popularnom jugoslovenskom kulturom (muzikom i filmom iz tog perioda)“ (Mijić, 2017: 188-189).

⁸ „(Ono što je najčešće i najupadljivije u svim nostalgичnim prizivanjima SFRJ): dobar životni standard, mogućnost zaposlenja i zarade, sigurnost posla“ (Spasić, 2012: 583).

⁹ Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

¹⁰ „SFRJ, naime, i dan-danas funkcioniše za obične ljude kao *model normalnog života*. Dvadeset godina posle pokretanja ‘promena’, stvari stoje tako, jer period preobražaja nije iznedrio nikakav novi, alternativni uzor, ideal kojem građani smatraju da treba i vredi težiti“ (Spasić, 2012: 581).

¹¹ „Kroz glorifikaciju socijalističkog perioda jugonostalgичari daju kritičku sliku sadašnjosti i sistema koji ih vodi u budućnost“ (Mijić, 2012: 123).

¹² „Pozitivno vrednovanje socijalističkog perioda osnaženo je kritičkim osvrtom na trenutnu socio-ekonomsku situaciju u državi“ (Mijić, 2012: 130).

despite the fact that it can represent the criticism of the current state of affairs in a certain society, Yugonostalgia does not possess an active role, namely it cannot be an agent in the (potential) transformation of the society. According to Mirkov et al., “Yugonostalgia cannot be politically active until there is a political subject that might articulate it”¹³ (Mirkov et al., 2018: 1254). This claim is further supported by Kuljić who, according to Spasić, argues that “Yugonostalgia might express dissatisfaction, but it cannot be criticism, because there is not a political subject that could directly operationalize the memories of the alternative model of the society”¹⁴ (Spasić, 2012: 591). In the light of what has been said, Yugonostalgia can hardly be considered subversive: at best, it can be interpreted as a model for some potential, future society or, as Velikonja argues, “the utopian desire for an ideal society” (Velikonja, 2013: 129). The Yugonostalgists do not actually aim at restoring old Yugoslavia, but at regeneration of the (ethical) values on which the former (dissolved) country was founded, namely brotherhood and unity, social justice, friendship, etc. (see Velikonja, 2013: 129). Therefore, Yugoslavia in the reminiscences of its former citizens might be considered as an “anticipation of a utopian society” (Velikonja, 2013: 129), a “potential vision of a better future” (Palmberger, 2008: 355), the fact that emphasizes its productive potential.

Yugonostalgia and the younger generation

Apart from Yugonostalgia experienced by the former citizens, it is important to talk about Yugonostalgia in the younger generations. In spite of Wildschut et al.’s claim that “nostalgia pertains to a personally experienced past” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 981), Markovina, according to Drašković, emphasizes the existence of the so-called “action type” of Yugoslavism which consists of the “young people who did not have the immediate experience of the life in Yugoslavia”¹⁵ (Drašković, 2016: 60). Mijić likewise highlights the importance of the neo-nostalgists, or “those who do not have a ‘direct’ experience of living in Yugoslavia, but are young people who, through mediated experiences, use the symbols and are nostalgic for the imagined community of SFRY”¹⁶ (Mijić, 2012: 121). According to Mijić:

“Neo-nostalgists experience stereotyping of Yugoslavia as a country of prosperity and the big part of their (virtual) nostalgias they created through the prism of their parents and their surroundings’ narratives. Namely, it seems that the youngest participants (in the questionnaire), who do not remember the period of socialism, feel more regret

¹³ „Jugonostalgija ne može biti politički delatna sve dok ne postoji politički subjekt koji bi to artikulisao“ (Mirkov et al., 2018: 1254).

¹⁴ „Jugonostalgija može izražavati nezadovoljstvo, ali ne može biti *kritika*, jer nema političkog subjekta koji bi sećanja na alternativni model društva neposredno operacionalizovao“ (Spasić, 2012: 591).

¹⁵ „Nosioći akcionog tipa jugoslovenstva su mladi ljudi koji nemaju iskustvo života u Jugoslaviji“ (Drašković, 2016: 60).

¹⁶ „Postoje mnogi neonostalgici, koji nemaju ‘živo’ iskustvo, već su to mladi ljudi koji posredovanim iskustvima koriste simbole i nostalgici su prema zamišljenoj zajednici SFRJ“ (Mijić, 2012: 121).

for the collectivist ideological system, than exclusively for the better living standard remembered by the participants of the middle generation. They think that the period of socialism was a better time for life and that they will never have, in a material sense, what their parents used to¹⁷) (Mijić, 2017:192).

A poll conducted by an Al Jazeera journalist in a high school in Podgorica testifies to the popularity of Yugoslavia among the younger generations: namely, the majority of the students opted for SFRY as their preference for where they would like to see Montenegro in the future¹⁸. Velikonja likewise talks about the phenomenon of neonostalgia or *neostalgia*, which is “an encouragement for something new which is associated with *good old times*” (Velikonja, 2013: 123), and is common among the younger, post-Yugoslav generations (see Velikonja, 2013: 123). Neo-nostalgists therefore represent a group of people (of the younger generation) who have a vicarious experience of life in Yugoslavia. In a commercial sense, neonostalgia or neostalgia has its counterpart in the commercial industry, the so-called “ercez nostalgia” which is defined as “a nostalgia ‘without lived experience or collective memory’, which in the market context is deliberately ‘installed’ in the goods, ‘as a trick pulled on the consumers to long for something they had never lost¹⁹’” (Drašković, 2016: 66-67). Wildschut et al. partially agree with this claim stating that “product styles (e.g., of music, motion pictures, and automobiles) that were popular during an individual’s youth influence the individual’s lifelong preferences” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 979-980). Thus, nostalgia may sometimes be used as a way of manipulating consumers, i.e., abusing their naivety.

Yugonostalgia and postmemory

Yugonostalgia might be discussed in the context of the so-called “postmemory”, the term that was coined by Marianne Hirsch. In her work, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch defines the concept of postmemory in the following manner:

“Postmemory describes the connection that exists between the members of the so-called second generation and powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their birth. However, these experiences are so strong that they seem to be the part of their own memory (the memory of the members of the second generation)” (Hirsch, 2012: 103).

¹⁷ „Kod njih (neonostalgičara) se javlja stereotipizacija Jugoslavije kao države blagostanja i veliki deo (virtuelnih) nostalgija stvorili su kroz prizmu narativa svojih roditelja i okoline. Naime, najmladji učesnici, koji ne pamte vreme socijalizma, čini se, imaju veći žal za kolektivističkim ideološkim sistemom, nego isključivo za boljim standardom koji pamte učesnici srednje generacije. Oni (neonostalgičari) smatraju da je tada bilo bolje vreme za život i da oni nikada neće imati, u materijalnom smislu, ono što su njihovi roditelji imali u vreme socijalizma“ (Mijić, 2017: 192).

¹⁸ Rašić, S. (2017). *Vodič kroz jugonostalgiju: Da li je 25. maj u modi? (Guide to Yugonostalgia: Is May 25 in Fashion?)*, Esquire Serbia. “Guide to Yugonostalgia” * Remembering Yugoslavia. <https://rememberingyugoslavia.com/guide-to-yugonostalgia/>

¹⁹ „Ercez nostalgija je nostalgija ‘bez proživljenog iskustva ili kolektivnog sećanja’, koja se u tržišnom kontekstu planski ‘ugrađuje’ u robu, ‘kao smicalicu koja navodi potrošače da čeznu za nečim što nisu ni izgubili“ (Drašković, 2016: 66-67).

Considering the given assertion, “it is not surprising that family represents a means of generating and transmitting given experiences, from ancestors to descendants” (Lazić, 2022: 83).

Despite the fact that the concept of postmemory primarily refers to the memory (and trauma) that the survivors of the Holocaust transmitted to their descendants, we will, for the purposes of this paper, endeavor to apply it on the memory of the former Yugoslav citizens and the memory that they, although vicariously, transmitted to their descendants (children and grandchildren). However, postmemory in relation to Yugoslavia might likewise be interpreted in the context of trauma: namely, Goli otok and the “psychological scars” that the former inmates bore from it represent the “dark side” of the otherwise idyllic Yugoslav history (which we will discuss further in subsequent analysis). The testimonies of the former inmates were often transmitted to their descendants.

Different forms of media have a significant share in transmitting Yugonostalgia, such as films, music, documentaries, etc. Moreover, various forms of media may perform a role of the so-called “prosthetic memory” in transmitting Yugonostalgia to the younger generations who do not have a direct experience of living in Yugoslavia. Historian Alison Lansberg, according to Scott, argues that “like an artificial limb, prosthetic memories originate outside a person’s lived experience and yet are taken on and worn by that person through mass cultural technologies of memory” (Scott, 2022: 135). Therefore, the prosthetic memory through popular media “bridges the gap” between the neo-nostalgists and the memories they do not personally possess. In the context of postmemory, a photo (as a form of visual media) has likewise a prominent role, as photos might represent a useful means of acquiring information about the past. Roland Barthes introduces the concept of “punctum” in the context of photography and states that photos might be perceived “as a place of intersection of the past and present” (Hirsch, 2012: 61). The younger generations might acquire an insight into the (Yugoslav) past (namely, the way that people lived, dressed, how they used to spend their time, etc.) by seeing the old photographs of their parents or even grandparents. Consequently, “photographs, alongside other documentary material, represent the only available means of acquiring information about the past (and the people that were part of it)”²⁰ (Lazić, 2022: 87). As Lawrence Quill in his work *Nostalgia and Political Theory* states, “the improved material comfort and technological advances (e.g., photography and radio) do not reduce the nostalgic impulse. In some ways, they increase it” (Quill, 2023: 11). However, photography might in a sense prove to be “deficient” since there exists “a constant fluctuation between what we may see and what we may find out by seeing”²¹ (Lazić, 2022: 87). In other words, there is a whole plethora of information that we cannot acquire

²⁰ „Samim tim, fotografije, pored drugog dokumentarnog materijala, predstavljaju možda i jedino sredstvo da o prošlosti (i ljudima koji su njen deo) nešto saznamo“ (Lazić, 2022: 87).

²¹ „Fotografije mogu u izvesnom smislu biti ‘manjkave’, jer je prilikom posmatranja određene fotografije prisutno konstantno fluktuiranje između onoga što možemo da vidimo i onoga što gledajući možemo da saznamo“ (Lazić, 2022: 87).

just by looking at a photograph. In the context of postmemory, Hirsch also stresses the importance of the so-called “family romance (of the Holocaust)” which is often equalized with the “journey to the past”. According to Hirsch, “journey is undertaken out of longing to rediscover the world that had existed before the loss occurred, out of need for the irrevocably lost innocence that descendants imagine and invoke” (Hirsch, 2012: 214). In the context of the aforementioned, it is important to emphasize that the people (especially those who lived in Yugoslavia) often express nostalgic feelings for the former country or, as Spasić argues, “all the characteristics of the Yugoslav and socialist past make it possible for one to discern, in the discourse of it, a strong feeling of nostalgia and a longing for a certain kind of the Lost Eden²²” (Spasić, 2012: 585). Through their stories (of those who had a direct experience of living in Yugoslavia), this “strong feeling of nostalgia and longing” is transmitted to the descendants.

Food is often something that invokes nostalgic feelings in the former Yugoslavs. Namely, “food is not only what it is, a means of satisfying one’s hunger, but it brings along the memories of the place(s) where we consumed it, and primarily of the dear people we were surrounded with: consequently, it bears a certain nostalgic note which invokes pleasant memories in a person²³” (Lazić, 2022: 89). Chu & Downes, according to Wildschut et al., state that “the role of sensory input is consistent with findings that tastes and odors can trigger vivid, affect-laden memories (i.e., the “Proust phenomenon”)” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 993). Among the most common delicacies the former Yugoslavs pine for are various brands of sugar-based confectionery, as well as rakija, Dalmatian wine and Sarajevo delicacies, etc. However, due to the existence of the various shopping malls and markets, the craving of the Yugo-nostalgists for their favorite delicacies can easily be overcome²⁴, unlike other, more abstract aspects of former Yugoslavia the nostalgists would like to compensate.

Goli otok – a dark spot in the Yugoslav history?

In spite of the fact that Yugoslavia remains an eternally idealized country in the reminiscences of its former citizens, its history is not impeccable. The testimonies of the majority of the ex-Yugoslavs deny the existence of the ideological monism, namely they “never mention the political repression or any other lack of freedom as the characteristics of the life in SFRJ²⁵” (Spasić, 2012: 584). Moreover, if they

²² „Sve ove karakteristike jugoslovenske i socijalističke prošlosti čine da se u govoru o njoj oseća snažan ton nostalgije i čežnje za nekom vrstom izgubljenog raja“ (Spasić, 2012: 585).

²³ „Hrana nije samo to što jeste, sredstvo da se utoli čovekova glad, već sa sobom nosi uspomene na mesto gde smo je konzumirali, a pre svega na drage ljude kojima smo tada bili okruženi. Stoga ona u sebi poseduje izvesnu nostalgičnu notu koja u čoveku izaziva lepe uspomene“ (Lazić, 2022: 89).

²⁴ Rašić, S. 2017. *Vodič kroz jugonostalgiju: Da li je 25. maj u modi? (Guide to Yugo-nostalgia: Is May 25 in Fashion?)*, Esquire Serbia. “Guide to Yugo-nostalgia” * Remembering Yugoslavia. <https://rememberingyugoslavia.com/guide-to-yugonostalgia/>

²⁵ „Ispitanici nisu ni u jednom trenutku pomenuli političku represiju ili neki drugi oblik neslobode kao obeležja života u SFRJ“ (Spasić, 2012: 584).

ever talk about this topic, they claim “that the politics was *better* back then and that it had less impact on the people’s lives than today, in the time of pluralism and democracy²⁶” (Spasić, 2012: 584). McAdams et al., according to Wildschut et al., mention the so-called “redemption sequence” as a pattern or narrative strategy “that people use to give their life stories meaning and coherence” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 981). According to this narrative strategy, “the narrative progresses from a negative life scene to a positive or triumphant one” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 981). Unlike redemption sequence, a contamination one “moves from an affectively positive life scene to an affectively negative one” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 981). Davis states that, according to Wildschut et al., “the nostalgic experiences are more typically characterized by redemption than by contamination sequences” (Wildschut et al., 2006: 981). Therefore, people are often prone to “romanticize” the past, losing the ability to perceive it objectively. However, try as they might to deny it or hush it up, the existence of the prison islands such as Goli otok and Sveti Grgur for the political prisoners remains an indisputable fact in the history of Yugoslavia. We will first provide the historical background of the establishment of these prisons on the territory of Yugoslavia.

The year of 1948 marked the final split between the politics of president Tito and Stalin and “a notable distancing of *our* communism from the communism that was present in other Eastern European countries under The Soviet Union²⁷” (Baković, 2008: 3), and consequently some radical changes that would ensue in Yugoslavia and that would bring about a form of collective paranoia. It all started with the year 1947, with the establishment of The Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties (or Cominform) on the territory of Poland. Cominform consisted of the communist parties of the following countries: The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, France, Italy and Bulgaria, and its establishment was a response to the clustering of Western countries headed by the USA, the event that marked the beginning of the Cold War between these two blocs. However, following the establishment of the numerous Yugoslav-Soviet societies, whose aim was to give rise to the economic cooperation between these two countries, there came about gradual conflict escalation. Namely, the political conflict of many of these Yugoslav-Soviet societies was directly opposed to that of Yugoslavian economic and political interests. “The final straw” that finally brought about an open enmity between The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia was the refusal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to attend the Cominform meeting in Bucharest in June 1948, as well as the refusal of its resolution, since Yugoslavian representatives knew that their proposals would not be accepted in the first place”

²⁶ „Ako se o tome nešto govorilo, tvrdilo se da je politika tada bila *bolja* i da je manje uticala na život ljudi nego danas, u doba pluralizma i demokratije“ (Spasić, 2012: 584).

²⁷ „(Razlog tome leži vjerojatno i u 1948. godini i znatnom odmaku *našeg* komunizma od komunizma kojim su bile zahvaćene ostale istočnoeuropske države pod plaštem Sovjetskog saveza“ (Baković, 2008: 3).

(Lazić²⁸, 2024: 206-207). At the same time, Yugoslavia had to deal with a hostile propaganda conducted by The Soviet Union: the aim of this propaganda was to weaken Yugoslavia's economy. Simultaneously, the supporters of the Cominform resolution endeavored to weaken Yugoslavian socialist economic system through espionage from the inside. Such an atmosphere brought about the mass arrests of the suspected political misfits (the so-called "Cominformists") and their sending to Goli otok and Sveti Grgur (the isolated Adriatic islands turned into concentration camps) and many other islands. These reckonings of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia with the real and the alleged political dissidents became the cruel and everyday reality of the Yugoslav people (Lazić, 2024: 207-208).

According to Lazić, "the aim of the incarceration of people on the islands of Goli otok and Sveti Grgur was the (political) re-education of the Stalinists (or Cominformists), the real and the alleged ones" (Lazić³⁰, 2024a: 95). However, this "political re-education" left deep psychological scars on the returnees from these islands, to the extent that many of them struggled to continue with their life. Martin Previšić, according to Lazić, states that:

"An analysis of the State Security Service states that 739 returnees from Goli otok became alcoholics, 350 criminals, while 739 indulged in 'other' vices. The returnees from Goli otok were not the same people that went serving their prison sentences. The parole found them broken in spirit, frightened, demoralized, disappointed, embittered and insecure³¹" (Lazić, 2024: 207).

In such an atmosphere, suicides of the former inmates of Goli otok became something common. Previšić, according to Lazić, argues that:

"A former inmate of Goli otok, Andrija Barić, 'committed suicide because of the Cominform', Nikola Burica lost his life in a rail accident throwing himself under the train 'for some unknown reason' in 1958, while Andrija Duplančić was expelled from the Communist party over his support for Cominform and poor performance at work in 1953, so he committed suicide next year feeling falsely accused³²" (Lazić, 2024a: 108).

²⁸ The historical background of the Cominform resolution might likewise be found in Isaković, A. (1982). *Tren 2: Kazivanja Čeperku*. Beograd: Prosveta.

²⁹ Lazić, K. (2024). The Holocaust, investigative discourse and *Bare life* – trauma and memory. *Uzdanica*, XXI/2, 205-219. <https://doi.ub.kg.ac.rs/doi/casopisi/10-46793-uzdanica21-2-2051/>

³⁰ Lazić, K. (2024a). The representation of PTSD in *The Original of the Forgery* by Dragan Kresoja. In Ž. Milanović & S. Skuban (Eds.), *The Seventh International Interdisciplinary Conference for Young Scholars in Social Sciences and Humanities: Contexts*, Book of Proceedings (pp. 91-112). Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.

³¹ „Jedna udbaška analiza govori kako se 739 povratnika odalo alkoholizmu, kriminalu 350, a 'ostalim' porocima 739. Povratnici s Golog otoka više nisu bili isti ljudi kao oni koji su otišli na izdržavanje kazne. Na slobodu, makar i uvjetnu, vratili su se slomljeni, uplašeni, demoralizirani, razočarani, ljuti, nesigurni“ (Lazić, 2024: 207).

³² „Andrija Barić učinio je 'samoubistvo radi IB-a', logoraš Nikola Burica učinio je samoubojstvo 1958. skokom pod vlak iz 'nepoznatih razloga', Andrija Duplančić isključen je iz SKJ zbog podrške IB-u i slabog rada 1953., pa se naredne godine ubio jer se 'osjećao nevin'“ (Lazić, 2024a: 108).

Even today, Goli otok remains a dark side of the history of Yugoslavia, a necessary evil resorted to in order for the unity of the country to be preserved.

The role of (popular) media in producing Yugonostalgia

When it comes to the role of media in producing Yugonostalgia in its consumers, its role might be momentous. Wilson stresses the influence of popular culture and the entertainment industry on nostalgia. This creation of mediated memories produced the so-called “displaced nostalgia”, nostalgia “for places and times that had no place in one’s own remembered past” (see Quill, 2023: 5). According to Wilson, “even if we haven’t directly experienced an event from the past, we may have a collective memory of the event, most likely through the media” (Quill, 2023: 5). Drašković states that:

“No story about the past is ‘a narratively neutral discursive form’, and its representation in the media always has certain ideological connotations since ‘media representations do not act only in talking to other people about us, but in talking to us about other people’ and serve as ‘a means of transmitting ideology in the service of maintaining and strengthening power relations³³” (Drašković, 2016:66).

Consequently, the media representation of Yugoslavia, resulting in Yugonostalgia in the spectators, does not have such a negligible role in an ideological sense. Nataša Simeunović Bajić, according to Ajduk, stresses the importance of media “in constructing and reconstructing the images of the past in order to invent the present³⁴” (Ajduk, 2016: 12). Nikolić, according to Drašković, argues that “media content, as the most important means of media memory/memory of the media, has the role of an active agent in: the interpretation of the past, development of the individual and collective identities, encounter with the past through the glorification of the success or facing the guilt³⁵” (Drašković, 2016: 64). Nora, according to Drašković, states that “media in general represent ‘the memory banks’ which, through the collection of individual memories, impose on and impress the social, and subsequently cultural or collective memory³⁶” (Drašković, 2016: 64). Radović highlights the role of mass media and popular culture “in regenerating and remodeling of the past³⁷” (Radović,

³³ „Nijedna priča o prošlosti ‘nije narativno neutralna diskurzivna forma’, a njeno predstavljanje u medijima uvek ima izvesne ideološke konotacije jer ‘medijske predstave ne deluju samo tako što drugim ljudima govore o nama, već i nama govore o drugim ljudima’ i služe kao ‘sredstvo za prenošenje ideologije u službi održavanja i jačanja odnosa moći’“ (Drašković, 2016: 66).

³⁴ „Nataša Simeunović Bajić primećuje kako se putem medija konstruišu i rekonstruišu slike prošlosti kako bi se osmislila sadašnjost“ (Ajduk, 2016: 12).

³⁵ „Medijski sadržaji, kao najznačajnija sredstva medijskog pamćenja/pamćenja medija, imaju ulogu aktivnog činioca u: tumačenju prošlosti, izgradnji individualnih i kolektivnih identiteta, susretu sa prošlošću kroz glorifikaciju uspeha ili suočenja sa krivicom“ (Drašković, 2016: 64).

³⁶ „Mediji generalno predstavljaju ‘banke sećanja’ koje, prikupljajući individualna sećanja, na taj način nameću i utiskuju društveno, a potom i kulturno ili kolektivno pamćenje“ (Drašković, 2016: 64).

³⁷ „Obnavljanje i remodelovanje prošlosti moguće je zahvaljujući i masovnim medijima i popularnoj

2015: 11). According to Bajić Simeunović, “mass media ‘pack’ the events in certain symbolic forms thus impacting the formation of all the patterns of culture³⁸” (Radović, 2015: 11). Consequently, mass media and popular culture (the film industry, TV shows, commercial products, music, etc.) might represent the most suitable means of helping people accept and identify with the values of the former Yugoslavia.

Popular culture may induce a creative potential of Yugonostalgia. As Velikonja states:

“Yugonostalgia has a significant creative potential within various fields of culture, including pop culture, and contemporary design and arts. In my opinion, this creativity constitutes its third emancipatory potential. Positive figures, episodes and values from the past have become an inspiration for the artists of various generations, ranging from film directors to performers” (Velikonja, 2013: 122).

Nevertheless, the “explosion” of Yugonostalgic themes and motifs in the film and music industry, TV shows, i.e., popular culture in general comes as no surprise.

The role of TV series is likewise of momentous importance in inducing Yugonostalgia in both the former Yugoslavs and the younger generations. According to Ajduk, “the influence of TV series is being reflected in the possibility of creation and presentation of certain ideas (about the specific time, the manner of life, and so on) which subsequently became accepted by a large number of people, and then newly reproduced through the different meanings that people give to it³⁹” (Ajduk, 2016:11). Krstić, according to Ajduk, argues that “if a TV series is being perceived as a segment of the popular culture which communicates with its consumers bidirectionally, a spectator becomes an active creator of the message, and not just a simple recipient of it⁴⁰” (Ajduk, 2016: 22). TV series might be interpreted as a “media which gives us the opportunity to peek into the past, i.e., to reconstruct that past through the shared ideas anew⁴¹” (Ajduk, 2016:12).

The research corpus

The corpus for our research will consist of the following material. When it comes to TV shows, we have included the selected examples:

kulturi“ (Radović, 2015: 11).

³⁸ „Masovni mediji dogadjaje ‘pakuju’ u odredjene simboličke forme utičući tako na formiranje svih obrazaca kulture“ (Radović, 2015: 11).

³⁹ „Uticaj (televizijskih serija) ogleda se u mogućnosti kreiranja i prezentovanja odredjene predstave (o nekom vremenu, načinu života i sl.) koja potom biva usvojena od strane velikog broja ljudi, a zatim iznova reprodukovana kroz različita značenja koja joj ti ljudi utiskuju“ (Ajduk, 2016: 11).

⁴⁰ „Ukoliko se televizijska serija posmatra kao segment popularne kulture koji komunicira sa svojim konzumentima dvosmerno, gledalac postaje aktivni primalac poruke, a ne tek puki primalac iste“ (Ajduk, 2016: 22).

⁴¹ „Serija tako može biti shvaćena kao medij na osnovu kojeg je moguće zaviriti u prošlost odnosno tu prošlost iznova konstruisati kroz deljene predstave“ (Ajduk, 2016: 12).

1. “Šou svih vremena” (“The show of all times”), a TV show that was broadcasted on RTS 1 during 2013-2014. The show host was the actor Nikola Kojo. The TV show covered music, dance, information, commercials, films, and more from the period of ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s.
2. “SFRJ za početnike” (“SFRY for beginners”). It is a documentary TV series of sixteen episodes formerly broadcasted during 2012., dealing with the topics of Yugoslav music, film, sport, fashion, popular culture, etc.

“The show of all times”

When it comes to the TV show “Šou svih vremena” (“The show of all times”), Radović states that “the TV show was initially planned as a collage-type TV show, consisting of the elements of the different television genres such as talk show, quiz, music show, performances (comedy sketches), etc.”⁴² (Radović, 2015: 13). Radović further argues that:

“This mixture of different genres was the characteristic of the central entertainment television program in Yugoslavia, which might directly suggest that the TV show is by its very structure and content an attempt at recreating certain segments of the entertainment shows from the period which arouses nostalgia for the former Yugoslavia in all the male and female participants of the TV show”⁴³ (Radović, 2015: 13-14).

Yugonostalgia as the main topic of the show is visible both in the internal and the external structure. Moreover, the TV show’s opening credit sequences contain Yugonostalgic elements, namely a video collage with the symbols and the characters the period from ‘50s till the end of ‘80s is known for, such as Arsen Dedić, David Bowie, Milena Dravić, Tito, Elvis Presley, Walter⁴⁴, Zdravko Čolić, Vučko⁴⁵, Andy Warhol’s Campbell’s soup cans and the Volkswagen Beetle⁴⁶ (see Radović, 2015:14). According to Radović, “‘The show of all times’ often has a firmly defined structure with the narrative subsets within which metanarrative elements of the former Yugoslavia are being formed”⁴⁷ (Radović, 2015: 14). “The show of all times” therefore represents a perfect example of a TV show which, “through the collective

⁴² „Emisija ‘Šou svih vremena’ je zamišljena kao emisija kolažnog tipa, sastavljena od elemenata televizijskih žanrova kao što su tok šou (talk show), kviz, muzički šou, igrane strukture (humoristički skečevi), itd.“ (Radović, 2015: 13).

⁴³ „Ova mješavina elemenata različitih žanrova upravo je bila karakteristična za centralni zabavni televizijski program u Jugoslaviji, što bi moglo direktno sugerisati da je emisija već svojom strukturom i sadržajem pokušaj rekreiranja određenih segmenata emisija zabavnog karaktera iz perioda koji kod svih učesnika i učesnica emisije budi nostalgiju za bivšom Jugoslavijom“ (Radović, 2015: 13-14).

⁴⁴ The fictional character from *Walter defends Sarajevo* (1972) played by Velimir Bata Živojinović. The film was directed by Hajrudin Krvavac.

⁴⁵ The Olympic mascot of 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo.

⁴⁶ a small family car typical for the period of Yugoslavia.

⁴⁷ „Emisija ‘Šou svih vremena’ ima često čvrstu definisanu strukturu sa narativnim podskupovima unutar kojih se grade elementi metanarativa o bivšoj Jugoslaviji“ (Radović, 2015: 14).

memory of the life and popular culture of the former Yugoslavia, positively interpreted and repositioned the relations and values of that period⁴⁸) (Radović, 2015: 23).

“SFRY for beginners”

“SFRY for beginners” is a TV show that was awarded a Silver Plaque at the Film festival in Chicago in the category of the documentary educational TV series (Drašković, 2016: 62). According to Drašković:

“As an important educational media content, ‘SFRY for beginners’ represents a link with the mutual cultural heritage of the Socialist Yugoslavia and an upgrade of the therapeutic process of decontamination of memories whose confiscation had been done during the nineties under the attack of the nationalist ideology in the newfound countries in the Western Balkan⁴⁹” (Drašković, 2016: 59).

Drašković further emphasizes the importance of SFRY as “an example of the representation of nostalgia as a positive discourse⁵⁰” (Drašković, 2016: 62), as well as the fact that “it addresses not only those spectators whose life in SFRY occupied smaller or bigger parts of their biographies but the younger generation that does not have a direct memory of that country⁵¹” (Drašković, 2016: 66). In the light of what has been said, “SFRY for beginners” is not an ideologically empty media content but it also holds “a clear ideological stance in the creation of the critical counter-narratives regarding the memory of Yugoslavia⁵²” (Drašković, 2016: 72).

Film and Yugonostalgia

According to Kennedy, “within theorizations of global and traveling memory, film has been granted a privileged position as a kind of prosthesis that can facilitate a mediated form of distant memory for viewers outside of the local or national collective that has an experiential or historic relation to the memory of an event” (Kennedy, 2017: 49). Grace Leksana, according to Kennedy, further argues that “film will provide an important vehicle for reconstructing ‘the nation’s social memory...

⁴⁸ „(Emisija nostalgije ‘Šou svih vremena’), kolektivnim prisjećanjem na život i popularnu kulturu bivše Jugoslavije, pozitivno je interpretirala i repozicionirala tadašnje odnose i vrijednosti“ (Radović, 2015: 23).

⁴⁹ „Kao važan edukativni medijski sadržaj ‘SFRJ za početnike’ predstavlja poveznicu sa zajedničkim kulturnim nasljedjem socijalističke Jugoslavije i nadogradnju terapijskom procesu dekontaminacije sećanja čija konfiskacija je izvršena devedesetih godina pred naletom nacionalističke ideologije u novoosnovanim državama na Zapadnom Balkanu“ (Drašković, 2016: 59).

⁵⁰ „‘SFRJ za početnike’ primer je predstavljanja nostalgije kao pozitivnog diskursa“ (Drašković, 2016: 62).

⁵¹ „Ona (emisija) se ciljano ne obraća samo onim gledaocima kojima je život u SFRJ zauzimao manji ili veći deo njihovih biografija nego i onoj mlađoj koja nema direktno sećanje na tu zemlju“ (Drašković, 2016: 66).

⁵² „(‘SFRJ za početnike’) ima i jasan ideološki stav u kreiranju kritičkih kontranarativa kada je u pitanju sećanje na Jugoslaviju“ (Drašković, 2016: 72).

since film had such a major contribution to constructing the existing social memory” (Kennedy, 2017: 50). Concerning motion pictures, the body of research would be too large to do honor to all the Yugoslav films dealing with the overall atmosphere that might invoke the nostalgic feelings in the audience that lived in the former Yugoslavia, as well as their descendants. Some of the films that we can enlist are: “Ko to tamo peva?” (“Who’s singing over there?”, 1980.), “Varljivo leto ‘68” (“The elusive summer of ‘68”, 1984.), “Maratonci trče počasni krug” (“Marathon runners do a lap of honor”, 1982.), “Nacionalna klasa” (“National Class Category Up to 785 cm”, 1979.), “Majstori, majstori” (“All that Jack’s”, 1980.), “Davitelj protiv davitelja” (“Strangler vs. Strangler”, 1984.), “Lude godine” and its later sequels (“Crazy years”, 1977.), etc.

The impact of music on Yugonostalgia

When it comes to music, it is undisputable that the music from the former Yugoslavia (Ex-Yu), ranging from rock, to pop, to folk music, is still popular nowadays; the invention of the Internet is boosting the popularity of this music. However, there are few radio stations or TV channels that broadcast exclusively the former Yugoslav music (be it rock, pop or folk). Some of the exceptions might be Radio Belgrade 202 that broadcasts pop and rock music (including Ex-Yu pop and rock music), Radio S Ex Yu (digital radio option) that broadcasts only Ex-Yu pop and rock music, and Radio Braid (Radio Pletenica) that, among others, broadcasts the old Yugoslav music.

Conclusion

In the paper, we have primarily dealt with the role of the selected media (TV shows, films and music) in producing Yugonostalgia primarily in the people that have a direct experience of living in Yugoslavia (the older and the middle generations) and, vicariously, in the younger generations. Through the analysis conducted on the selected corpus we have reached the conclusion that media can by no means be an ideologically empty content, but may deliberately be employed in the (re)creation and (re)interpretation of the certain ideologies and their values, in this case Yugonostalgia and its values. It is important to note here that people often use these values as a form of criticism of the negative aspect of the present and its deficiencies, through the comparison of socialism in Yugoslavia with the current political system(s). In line with the preceding analysis and the implication of media-constructed nostalgia in post-socialist contexts and its political ramifications, it is important to talk about the concept of “collective memory and collective future thought” (see Szpunar and Szpunar, 2016: 381). Coser, according to Szpunar and Szpunar, states that “collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present” (Szpunar and Szpunar, 2016: 381). As Szpunar and Szpunar further argue, “the ways in which past conflict is remembered in the contemporary

moment are more an indication of current needs, intentions, schisms, and aesthetics than those that defined the original milieu in which the past conflict unfolded” (Szpunar and Szpunar, 2016:381). When it comes to collective future thought, “it serves as a driving force of collective memory and can affect the ways in which a past is reconstructed. (...) The invocation of collective memories is often goal-oriented, supporting future visions. (...) We use memory to imagine the future” (Szpunar and Szpunar, 2016: 382). Therefore, the former Yugoslavs (and the Yugonostalgists in general) might resort to the memory of the past (of the “idyllic” Yugoslav past) in an endeavor to imagine the future, to potentially re-establish that “perfect” country or create a country akin to it.

References

- Ajduk, M. (2016). „Vesele“ osamdesete kroz prizmu televizijske serije *Crno-bijeli svijet*. [„Joyful“ eighties from the perspective of a TV show *Black & White World*] *Antropologija* vol. 16, no. 2, 9-25.
- Baković, I. (2008). (Jugo)nostalgija kroz naočale popularne kulture. [(Yugo)nostalgia through the spectacles of popular culture] *Philological Studies* vol. 6, no. 2, 1-12.
- Dražković, B. (2016). Jugonostalgija u televizijskoj seriji „SFRJ za početnike“. [Yugonostalgia in television documentary series „SFRJ for beginners“] *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, vol. XLI-1. doi: 10.19090/gff.2016.1.59-76
- Hirsch, M. (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press.
- Isaković, A. (1982). *Tren 2: Kazivanja Čeperku*. Beograd: Prosveta.
- Kennedy, R. (2017). Remembering the Indonesian Killings: *The Act of Killing* and the Global Memory Imperative. In L. Bond et al. (Eds.), *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, (pp. 47-64). New York: Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvswx786>
- Lazić, K. (2022). The reflection of the past and the poetics of the postmemory. In K. Melić, M. Nešić Pavković & D. Bošković (Eds.), *Holocaust, memory, culture (I)* (pp. 83-91) Faculty of philology and arts, University of Kragujevac.
- Lazić, K. (2024). The Holocaust, investigative discourse and *Bare life* – trauma and memory. *Uzdanica*, XXI/2, 205-219. <https://doi.ub.kg.ac.rs/doi/casopisi/10-46793-uzdanica21-2-2051/>
- Lazić, K. (2024a). The representation of PTSD in *The Original of the Forgery* by Dragan Kresoja. In Ž. Milanović & S. Skuban (Eds.), *The Seventh International Interdisciplinary Conference for Young Scholars in Social Sciences and Humanities: Contexts*, Book of Proceedings (pp. 91-112). Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.
- Mijić, E. (2012). Od nostalgije do yustalgije. [From Nostalgia to Yustalgia: Basic Concepts] In M. Rašević & M. M. Marković (Eds.), *Pomeraćemo granice [We will move the limits]* (pp. 115-134) Institut društvenih nauka.

- Mijić, E. (2017). Kulturna sećanja i individualizam u jugonostalgичnim narativima. [Culture of memory and individualism in the Yugonostalgic narratives] In S. Ignjatović & A. Bošković (Eds.), *Individualizam [Individualism]* (182-199) Institut društvenih nauka.
- Mirkov, A. Ž. et al. (2018). Sećanje na socijalističku Jugoslaviju: stavovi građana Srbije u periodu ubrzane transformacije društva. [Remembering socialist Yugoslavia: attitudes of Serbian citizens in the period of accelerated transformation of society] *Sociološki pregled* vol. 52, no. 4, 1251-1284. doi: 10.5937/socpreg52-19347
- Palmberger, M. (2008). Nostalgia matters: nostalgia for Yugoslavia as potential vision for a better future. *Sociologija* vol. L, no. 4, 355-370. DOI: 10.2298/SOC0804355P
- Previšić, M. (2023). *Goli otok, istorija: Titov logor kroz arhive UDBE i iskaze svedoka*. Beograd: Vukotić media.
- Quill, L. (2023). *Nostalgia and Political Theory*. New York and London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Radović, O. (2015). Jugonostalgija u savremenom TV programu: narativi u emisiji „Šou svih vremena“ [Yugo-nostalgia in modern television: narratives in the show „Šou svih vremena“] *Communication and Media Journal* 33, 5-26. doi: 10.5937/comman10-7883
- Rašić, S. (2017). *Vodič kroz jugonostalgiju: Da li je 25. maj u modi? (Guide to Yugonostalgia: Is May 25 in Fashion?)*, Esquire Serbia. “Guide to Yugonostalgia” * Remembering Yugoslavia. <https://rememberingyugoslavia.com/guide-to-yugonostalgia/>
- Scott, J. (2022). Representing the Shoah on Hollywood screens: mimesis, artifice, and memory. *The Mirror – Undergraduate History Journal*, 42(1), 134-148. <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernmirror/article/view/15164>
- Spasić, I. (2012). Jugoslavija kao mesto normalnog života: sećanja običnih ljudi u Srbiji. [Yugoslavia as a Place for Living a Normal Life: Memories of Ordinary People in Serbia] *Sociologija*, vol. LIV, no. 4, 577-594. DOI:10.2298/SOC1204577S
- Szpunar, P. M., Szpunar, K. K. (2016). Collective future thought: Concept, function, and implications for collective memory studies. *Memory Studies*, Vol. 9(4), 376-389. DOI:10.1177/1750698015615660
- van Tilburg, W., Igou, E. R. (2013). In Search of Meaningfulness: Nostalgia as an Antidote to Boredom. *EMOTION*, 13(3), 450-461. DOI:10.1037/a0030442
- Velikonja, M. (2013). The Past with a Future: The Emancipatory Potential of Yugonostalgia: Political Mythologies, Reconciliations, and the Uncertain Future in the Former Yugoslavia. In S. Pavlović & M. Živković (Eds.), *Transcending Fratricide* (pp. 109-128). Nomos. DOI:10.5771/9783845247601-109
- Wildschut, T. et al. (2006). Nostalgia: Content, Triggers, Functions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(5), 975-993. DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.91.5.975

TV shows:

- Marković, Dj. (Director). (2012-). *SFRJ za početnike [SFRY for beginners]*. Keser, S., Petrović, D. (producers).
- Milinković, M., Stefanović, I. (Directors). (2013-2014). *Šou svih vremena [The show of all times]*. Beograd: Radio-televizija Srbije.

Films:

- Čalić, Z. (1977). *Lude godine* [Crazy years]. SFRY: Zvezda film Novi Sad; Zeta film Budva; Morava film Beograd, Filmska radna zajednica Lude godine.
- Marković, G. (1979). *Nacionalna klasa* [National Class Category Up to 785 ccm]. SFRY: Centar film.
- Marković, G. (1980). *Majstori, majstori* [All That Jack's]. SFRY: Art film 80; Zvezda film; Ineks film – Beograd; Union film; Kinema Sarajevo.
- Paskaljević, G. (1984). *Varljivo leto '68* [The Elusive Summer of '68]. SFRY: Centar film.
- Šijan, S. (1980). *Ko to tamo peva?* [Who's singing over there?]. SFRY: Centar film.
- Šijan, S. (1982). *Maratonci trče počasni krug* [Marathon Runners Do a Lap of Honor]. SFRY: Centar film.
- Šijan, S. (1984). *Davitelj protiv davitelja* [Strangler vs. Strangler]. SFRY: Centar film.

Mediji kao kreatori sećanja: uloga televizije, filma i muzike u konstrukciji jugonostalgije kroz generacije

Katarina S. Lazić, Filološko-umetnički fakultet, Univerzitet u Kragujevcu, Srbija

Sažetak

U radu smo se prevashodno bavili ulogom medija (filmovima, TV emisijama i muzikom) u izazivanju osećaja jugonostalgije kod nekadašnjih građana Jugoslavije i, posredno, kod njihovih potomaka, iako oni nisu bili rođeni tokom postojanja Jugoslavije, te ne mogu imati iskustvo života u njoj. Shodno navedenom, mediji se pokazuju ne samo kao sredstvo od velikog značaja u kreiranju deljenog, kros-generacijskog pamćenja koje mladim generacijama pruža priliku da uvide kako je izgledao život u Jugoslaviji. Korpus istraživanja sastojao se od odabranih primera jugoslovenskih filmova, zabavnih programa koji su i danas deo televizijskog sadržaja, kao i radio stanica koje emituju specifično muziku sa prostora bivše Jugoslavije. Analizom se došlo do zaključka da video ili zvučni sadržaj može predstavljati moćno sredstvo u izazivanju prijatnih ili neprijatnih emocija kod njihovih potencijalnih konzumenata, ili pak u premošćavanju kros-kulturalnog ili kros-generacijskog jaza.

Ključne reči: mediji, jugonostalgija, filmovi, muzika, pamćenje

Received: 2nd April 2025

Revision received: 14th November 2025

Accepted: 20th January 2026

Information or Manipulation: Media Literacy as a Critical Competence (A Qualitative Content Analysis of the *Medijska pismenost* Platform)

Anja Savić¹², Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Milica Jović³, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

In order to adapt to changes in their environment, individuals should develop media literacy, both among audiences and media professionals, while fostering critical awareness. This paper examines the role of media literacy in the development of critical thinking within the contemporary digital media environment. The aim of the research is to analyze how a specialized educational platform, specifically the website *Media Literacy (Medijska pismenost - https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/)*, frames and constructs media literacy, critically interprets media content, and recognizes disinformation, manipulation, and fake news. In a digital environment characterized by content hyperproduction, critical thinking becomes a necessary mechanism of protection against disinformation and media manipulation. Therefore, the central research question of this study is: How does the *Medijska pismenost* platform conceptualize and operationalize media literacy as a pedagogical practice? The research focuses on the analysis of selected sections of the website *Media Literacy*. The methodological framework includes qualitative content analysis applied to selected educational texts dealing with media manipulation, disinformation, fact-checking practices, the role of the audience, and the critical interpretation of media messages.

Keywords: media literacy, critical thinking, media education, fact-checking

Information or Manipulation: Media Literacy as a Critical Competence (A Qualitative Content Analysis of the *Medijska pismenost* Platform)

Introduction

Modern society functions under conditions of constant exposure to media, as well as constant information production, where the boundaries between facts, manipulation, and disinformation are disappearing. The media are no longer merely

¹ Corresponding author: a.savic-22163@filfak.ni.ac.rs

² ORCID: 0009-0009-2669-8340

³ ORCID: 0009-0002-8327-7963

intermediaries between events and the audience but active agents in shaping reality. In such an environment, an individual's ability to understand and critically evaluate media content becomes a key competency for the modern citizen. In this context, media literacy cannot be reduced solely to the technical skill of using digital technologies; rather, it involves a complex set of diverse abilities that enable a critical relationship with information and its sources. In this sense, media literacy represents the foundation for the development of any form of critical thinking. Based on these theoretical and social assumptions, this paper analyzes the relationship between media literacy and the development of critical thinking in the contemporary media environment. The paper proceeds from the premise that media literacy represents a key mechanism in building a responsible relationship toward media content; additionally, modern educational platforms play a crucial role in shaping media users in contemporary society. This study does not examine audience effects, but rather analyzes how media literacy is discursively constructed and pedagogically operationalized within a specialized educational platform.

Theoretical Framework: Media Literacy as the Foundation of Critical Thinking in a Digital Environment

Media literacy has been widely conceptualized as a critical educational competence. According to David Buckingham, media literacy involves "the ability to access, understand, analyze and evaluate media messages" (Buckingham, 2003).

Media literacy is widely recognized as an essential competency in contemporary digital societies. It generally refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages across different formats and contexts. Scholars emphasize that media literacy enables individuals to critically interpret information, understand the processes of media production, and recognize potential manipulation within media messages. In an environment characterized by an overwhelming flow of information, these competencies become crucial for navigating complex media landscapes (Potter, 2008).

Critical thinking is closely connected to the concept of media literacy. It represents a form of reflective and self-directed thinking that allows individuals to evaluate information, question assumptions, and form independent judgments. Individuals who develop critical thinking skills are better equipped to interpret media content, recognize bias, and assess the credibility of different information sources. In this sense, media literacy supports the development of analytical competencies that enable audiences to distinguish between factual information and manipulative narratives.

Media literacy is also understood as a set of competencies that allow individuals to critically engage with media environments and participate effectively in democratic societies. As Livingstone argues, media literacy involves the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages across different media contexts (Livingstone, 2004).

The contemporary digital media environment is characterized by rapid information circulation, content hyperproduction, and increasingly blurred boundaries between facts, opinions, and manipulative communication. Within such a context, media literacy becomes a fundamental capacity for modern citizens. It is not limited to the technical ability to use media technologies, but also involves the cognitive and interpretative skills necessary for evaluating media messages and understanding their broader social context. As Hobbs (2010) explains, digital and media literacy involves the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using various forms of communication, highlighting its multidimensional character.

This multidimensionality indicates that media-literate individuals are not passive recipients of media messages but active participants in public communication. Media literacy therefore encompasses analytical, participatory, and ethical dimensions that shape how individuals engage with media content. Within democratic societies, these competencies contribute to more informed public participation and strengthen the ability of citizens to critically assess information circulating in the media sphere.

The expansion of digital media has also intensified the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative communication practices. The speed of online communication, algorithmic distribution of content, and participatory media environments enable misleading information to circulate rapidly across digital platforms. In such circumstances, media literacy becomes an essential mechanism for identifying disinformation strategies and evaluating the credibility of media sources.

Importantly, media literacy should not be understood solely as a technological competence. As Hobbs (2010) emphasizes, the educational benefits of digital technologies depend on the pedagogical frameworks through which they are applied. Without critical interpretative skills, technological tools may contribute to the spread of manipulation rather than to meaningful learning. For this reason, critical thinking is often described as a central component of digital and media literacy.

The connection between media literacy and democratic participation has also been highlighted in the literature. McDougall (2019b), drawing on earlier work by Hoggart, emphasizes that democratic societies require citizens who are not only literate but also critically literate in order to participate effectively in public life. From this perspective, media literacy represents not only an individual skill but also a social competency that enables citizens to engage responsibly in democratic communication processes.

In educational contexts, media literacy is closely related to the development of critical thinking abilities. Milošević (2023) emphasizes that critical thinking functions as an active interpretative mechanism through which individuals evaluate media messages and recognize negative media influences. The development of a critical relationship toward media content contributes to strengthening both critical thinking and media literacy competencies, indicating a mutually reinforcing relationship between these two concepts.

Furthermore, the absence of media literacy education may have broader social consequences. Without systematic educational efforts in this field, audiences may

become more vulnerable to manipulation, populist narratives, and disinformation campaigns. The ability to recognize emotionally charged messages, ideological framing, and populist discourse therefore represents an important dimension of media literacy in contemporary media environments. “Critical media literacy expands traditional media literacy by encouraging individuals not only to analyze media messages but also to examine underlying power structures, ideological assumptions, and economic interests embedded in media production” (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Scholars also link media literacy with civic engagement and democratic participation. Mihailidis (2014) argues that media literacy enables citizens to evaluate information more critically and participate more actively in democratic processes. Through the development of analytical and interpretative skills, individuals become better equipped to navigate complex information environments and engage in informed public discourse.

Overall, media literacy can be understood as a complex and multi-layered concept encompassing cognitive, social, and ethical dimensions. It involves not only understanding media content but also recognizing the interests, power structures, and potential effects behind media messages. In this sense, media literacy plays an important role in strengthening democratic culture and supporting informed public participation. Within contemporary digital environments characterized by information hyperproduction, media literacy represents a key mechanism for distinguishing factual information from manipulation and for developing critical thinking skills.

While existing literature emphasizes the importance of media literacy in combating disinformation, fewer studies examine how educational platforms operationalize these principles in practice.

Media Literacy as a Response to the Phenomenon of Disinformation

In contemporary digital environments, disinformation and fake news represent significant challenges for democratic communication and public understanding. The rapid expansion of digital media platforms has facilitated the widespread circulation of misleading and manipulative information, creating complex challenges for audiences attempting to evaluate the credibility of media sources.

In academic literature, these phenomena are often analyzed through the concept of “information disorder”, which encompasses different forms of problematic information, including misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. This conceptual framework allows researchers to examine both unintentional inaccuracies and intentionally manipulative communication strategies that shape contemporary media ecosystems (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Within this context, media literacy has increasingly been recognized as a key strategy for addressing the challenges posed by disinformation. Rather than focusing solely on reactive mechanisms such as fact-checking, scholars emphasize the importance of developing critical competencies that enable individuals to evaluate information independently. McDougall (2019a) explains that media literacy should

be understood as a process of building resilience against information disorder by strengthening citizens' ability to analyze and interpret media content within broader social contexts.

The development of these competencies allows audiences to move beyond superficial assessments of credibility and instead engage in deeper critical reflection on the origin, intention, and construction of media messages. In this sense, media literacy functions as a preventive rather than purely corrective mechanism in addressing disinformation.

Research on disinformation further demonstrates that misleading information is often deliberately constructed to resemble legitimate journalistic content. Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) note that the phenomenon commonly described as "fake news" includes intentionally fabricated or misleading information designed to imitate credible news reporting. Such strategies complicate audiences' ability to distinguish between reliable information and manipulative narratives.

The digital media environment also shapes patterns of exposure to misinformation. Studies indicate that digital ecosystems, including algorithmic content distribution and social media networks, significantly influence how individuals encounter and interact with false information. In this context, media literacy can function as a protective factor that helps audiences recognize manipulation and critically evaluate information sources (Guess et al., 2020).

Further research highlights the importance of understanding disinformation within broader social and political contexts. Technological solutions alone are insufficient for addressing the structural challenges posed by manipulative information flows. As Lenoir and Anderson (2023) argue, effective responses to disinformation require a comprehensive understanding of the social, historical, and institutional factors that shape the production and circulation of misleading information.

Educational approaches therefore play a crucial role in strengthening resilience to disinformation. Pedagogical research indicates that media literacy programs can significantly improve individuals' ability to identify misleading information and evaluate media sources more critically (Adjin-Tettey, 2022). Such findings support the argument that media education can contribute to building long-term resistance to manipulative communication practices. "Research on misinformation also highlights the importance of media literacy in helping individuals critically evaluate misleading content and develop resilience to manipulative information online" (Vraga & Bode, 2017).

Within this perspective, media literacy should be integrated into broader educational frameworks rather than treated as a short-term intervention. McDougall (2019b) emphasizes that systematic media education within formal schooling can more effectively prepare young citizens to navigate complex information environments as opposed to reactive tools such as fact-checking mechanisms alone.

Ultimately, theoretical approaches to media literacy highlight its role as a comprehensive framework for understanding and responding to contemporary information challenges. By developing critical thinking skills and analytical competencies, media literacy enables individuals not only to identify inaccurate

information but also to understand the broader processes shaping media communication. As such, it represents an essential component of democratic participation in digital societies.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine how media literacy is conceptually presented and operationalized within educational digital platforms. Specifically, the research utilizes qualitative content analysis. QCA is particularly suitable for this study as the focus remains on the interpretation of educational media texts rather than the quantitative measurement of audience responses. This method allows for an in-depth examination of how media literacy concepts, critical thinking strategies, and representations of disinformation are articulated and framed within the analyzed platform.

The analysis focuses on the Media Literacy educational platform (*medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba*), developed by the *Raskrinkavanje* team as a resource to strengthen audience abilities to evaluate media content, recognize manipulation, and understand journalistic standards.

The research sample consisted of 11 purposively selected educational articles published on the *Medijska pismenost* platform. In order to enhance transparency and replicability, a complete list of analyzed texts, including URLs and dates of access, is provided in Appendix A. The selection of texts was guided by the following criteria:

1. Thematic relevance: The text explicitly addresses media literacy, disinformation, or fact-checking.
2. Educational purpose: The content is designed as instructional material for skill development.
3. Conceptual relevance: The text provides frameworks for the interpretation of media messages.

Based on these criteria, the analysis focuses on representative texts from the following key sections:

- “What Kind of Media Should We Have?”
- “How to Recognize Credible Media”
- “Basic Elements of Media Reporting”
- “Fake News”
- “Media Ethics”
- “Who Owns the Media and Why Is It Important?”

The analysis was conducted using deductive thematic coding. The analysis focused on several thematic categories, including representations of media literacy, references to misinformation, educational framing strategies, and approaches to critical thinking. An analytical framework was developed a priori, based on existing media literacy theory and the study’s research questions. The texts were systematically examined and categorized according to the following predefined dimensions:

1. Conceptualization of Media Literacy: How the platform defines the term and its necessity.
2. Strategies for Critical Thinking: Instructional methods used (e.g., verification techniques, deconstruction).
3. Representation of Disinformation: Explanations of mechanisms, actors, and economic/political motives.
4. Role of the Audience: Positioning of users as either passive recipients or active, critical interpreters.
5. Ethics and Transparency: Presentation of professional standards and ownership as markers of credibility.

During the coding process, textual segments were analyzed in relation to these categories to identify dominant narratives and interpret how the platform constructs media literacy as a necessary civic competence. This procedure enabled the identification of recurring interpretative patterns and dominant narratives through which the platform frames media literacy and critical thinking.

To ensure transparency and methodological rigor, a structured codebook was developed prior to the analysis. The coding framework was primarily deductive, based on established media literacy theory and aligned with the study's research questions. Each category was operationalized through clear definitions and applied systematically across the corpus. Table 1 presents the analytical categories, their purpose, coding logic, and unit of analysis.

Table 1
Analytical Codebook and Coding Units

Category	Operational Definition	Coding Logic	Unit of Analysis	Rationale
Conceptualization of media literacy	Statements defining media literacy and explaining its importance, purpose, or social role	Deductive	Paragraph	Derived from core media literacy definitions in the literature (e.g., Buckingham, Potter, Hobbs)
Critical thinking strategies	Pedagogical tools and step-by-step guidance encouraging verification, questioning, and analytical reading (e.g., 5W model, source checking)	Deductive	Segment	Focused on how critical thinking is operationalized in educational discourse
Representation of disinformation	Descriptions of fake news, manipulation, misinformation/disinformation, including causes, actors, motives, and consequences	Deductive	Segment	Based on "information disorder" approaches and disinformation scholarship
Role of the audience	Framing of the audience as passive, vulnerable, responsible, active, or participatory; references to user responsibility and civic engagement	Deductive	Paragraph	Connects to media literacy as civic competence and participatory literacy

Category	Operational Definition	Coding Logic	Unit of Analysis	Rationale
Ethics and transparency	Mentions of professional standards, journalistic codes, ownership transparency, accountability, and credibility indicators	Deductive	Segment	Based on normative media ethics and trust-building frameworks
Emergent interpretative patterns	Recurrent rhetorical framings or metaphors (e.g., “pirate media”, “real vs. fake media”) that were not predefined but appeared repeatedly	Inductive	Segment	Included to capture discursive patterns not anticipated in the initial theoretical framework

The coding process combined deductive application of predefined categories with limited inductive refinement, allowing recurring discursive patterns to be identified within the material. This approach ensured theoretical grounding while also preserving sensitivity to context-specific framings present in the platform’s content.

Since the analysis followed a single-coder research design, intercoder reliability was not calculated. However, consistency was ensured through iterative refinement of the coding categories and repeated close reading of the corpus, with coded segments continuously compared across texts to reduce interpretative inconsistency.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the Media Literacy platform conceptualize the notion of media literacy?
2. What educational strategies are used to develop critical thinking among users?
3. How are disinformation and media manipulation represented within the platform’s content?

Based on the research questions, the study formulates the following analytical hypotheses, which are treated as interpretative expectations and remain open to partial confirmation or disconfirmation through qualitative content analysis.

H1: The study examines whether the Medijska pismenost platform frames media literacy primarily as a “critical filter” through which audiences are expected to evaluate the credibility and reliability of media content.

H2: The analysis explores whether the platform operationalizes critical thinking through instructional strategies of message deconstruction, particularly by emphasizing verification practices (source, context, and intention) and journalistic analytical frameworks such as the 5W model.

H3: The study investigates whether disinformation is framed as a systemic phenomenon connected to broader structural factors, including economic incentives, emotional manipulation, and the logic of attention-driven digital media environments.

Analysis of *Medijska pismenost* Website

Help in learning or in “finding” the truth can also be sought on the internet itself. Today, there are many websites dedicated to educating people in media literacy. For example, the website Media Literacy (<https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/>), provides educational materials aimed at strengthening users’ ability to critically evaluate media content. This website has been successfully run for years by Tijana Cvjetićanin, Emir Zulejhić, Darko Brkan, and Biljana Livančić Milić. This is the same team that edits and manages the Raskrinkavanje platform. Together with the rest of the team, they sign every text published on the site.

Additionally, it is important to note that the Media Literacy website is not an independent project, but functions as part of the Raskrinkavanje platform, which is run by the non-governmental organization *Zašto ne*, based in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The platform is not a traditional media outlet, but rather a civil society project with an educational function. It does not belong to either state-owned or commercial media. It is stated: “The Raskrinkavanje platform has so far been funded with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Embassy of the United States of America in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Center for the Promotion of Civil Society (CPCD), the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), the Open Society Foundation (OSF), the Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD), and the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Since 2020, Raskrinkavanje has also participated in Facebook’s independent fact-checking program, which is another source of funding for the platform”. Funding is predominantly based on international donations, often from Western foundations rather than the state, which allows for relative independence from local political structures, but at the same time raises the question of the influence of donor priorities (donor agendas). All data on donations and funding are publicly available.

Raskrinkavanje is dedicated to verifying the accuracy of media information (so-called fact-checking), with a special focus on online media. However, fact-checking, although important, cannot be the only tool in the fight against falsehoods and disinformation. The best approach is to develop users’ ability to recognize them independently, along with creating “good habits” for navigating the media landscape – in other words, strengthening media literacy. This, as stated, was also the motivation for launching this website.

Given that it is based on experience in fact-checking, the Media Literacy website primarily focuses on informational media content (reporting) and does not aim to cover all aspects of media literacy. Its main mission is to transform the concrete knowledge and experience gained through exposing various media manipulations into content that will help readers develop a critical attitude toward media information. For example, if the credibility of a particular media outlet is in question – whether it has previously published fake news, disinformation, or unverified information – it is possible to search the Raskrinkavanje database.

Construction of “Real” and “Fake” Media, Normative Evaluation of Media Practices and Professional Codes

“What kind of media should we have?” The answer to this question serves as both a guide and a solution. Clearly defined parameters and adherence to positive practices reduce the possibility of manipulation. The section of the website titled “What kind of media should we have?” raises sub-questions that are answered through an analysis of a world in which all media compete for the audience’s attention. In the contemporary media ecosystem, as the authors call it, concepts such as ownership, quality, editorial practices, credibility, and the ethical responsibility of content become key to further interpretation. The analyzed texts explore how different factors – such as the use of original resources, verified sources, and respect for professional standards – shape the quality and reliability of information. Questions about who owns the information, how it is presented, and to whom it is directed form the basis for the critical evaluation of media and digital services.

The analyzed segment of the website shows a clear division of media into “real” and “fake”, “responsible” and “manipulative”, “professional” and “pirate”. This opposition creates an ideal type of media and desirable audience behavior. The texts do not view media as neutral channels of information transmission, but rather place them within a framework of political and economic influence and responsibility. Particular emphasis is placed on concepts such as the imprint (impressum), transparent ownership, and editorial accountability. In this way, a media outlet is not defined solely by its content, but also by its institutional structure and the context in which it operates.

In the analyzed text, “fake media” are not presented merely as unprofessional actors, but as those who abuse freedom of speech without assuming responsibility. The argument is based on a moral dichotomy: legitimate media enjoy freedom with responsibility, while fake media use freedom without responsibility. Thus, the issue of professionalism is expanded into a broader question of ethics and social responsibility.

Particularly significant is the metaphor of “pirates in the media market”, which portrays anonymous portals as unfair competition. This introduces an economic dimension to the analysis, namely profit generation through advertising. Fake media are therefore depicted not only as spreaders of disinformation, but also as disruptors of market balance by exploiting the work of others. Disinformation is defined as “a form of media manipulation based on facts, but misrepresented – which means it contains a ‘mix’ of facts and inaccurate information or half-truths” (Raskrinkavanje, *Dezinformacija*⁴). Truth and objectivity are understood as fundamental elements of media reporting. In this way, the audience is encouraged to understand the broader structure of the media system, not merely individual pieces of content.

Ethics is introduced as a regulatory framework and professional standard, presented as the foundation of legitimacy. Self-regulation through journalistic codes

⁴ <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/oblici-manipulacija-i-kome-se-obratiti-ako-ih-uocite/koji-sve-oblici-medijskih-manipulacija-postoje/dezinformacija/>

emphasizes accurate, precise, and relevant reporting in the public interest. It is considered through several dimensions:

Transparency – clear identification of sources and context;

Objectivity and neutrality – as the basis of credibility;

Responsibility for consequences – authors must anticipate the social impact of their content.

The audience is clearly called to responsibility: consuming unethical content means supporting it. The idea of market responsibility is introduced – every click becomes a political and ethical act.

Avoiding websites that publish inaccurate information is presented as the most effective way to combat unethical practices.

The Role of the Audience, Verification, and the Political-Economic Context

One of the platform's main goals is to translate general principles into concrete, verifiable steps, thereby fostering the development of critical thinking among the audience. For example, users are encouraged to check for the existence of a legal notice, examine ownership transparency, distinguish between international and national domains, and use tools such as DomainTools, Who.is, and Facebook content analysis via CrowdTangle. In this way, the authors provide practical steps for verifying the authenticity of information.

Source authentication refers to verification processes in which information coming from reliable or verified sources (experts, academic publications, relevant statistical data) is considered credible. Therefore, media credibility is not assumed – it must be verified. At the same time, part of the responsibility is transferred to the audience, which is seen as an active participant. The text emphasizes that the audience is not a passive victim of manipulation, but actively participates in the creation and analysis of content. Interaction with content – through comments, sharing, and critique – represents an informal form of verification. As stated, “an audience that chooses to read and watch such content sends a message that unethical, sensationalist, and misleading journalism pays off” (Raskrinkavanje.ba, *Šta je medijska etika?*⁵).

The segment dedicated to the “5W” model represents an important analytical element. Media content is evaluated through selection, and the insistence on the questions “what, where, when, who, and why” functions as a filter for assessing credibility. Media literacy is thus operationalized through classical journalistic standards.

The application of the “5W” model indicates a systematic approach:

Who – identifying the author, institution, or organization;

What – determining whether the content is reporting, interpretation, or analysis;

When – assessing timeliness and relevance;

Where – defining the geographical context;

Why – examining the purpose of publication.

⁵ <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnost-vijest/sta-je-medijska-etika/>

The text is broken down into the elements of a news report, and key unanswered questions are identified. This strategy has strong educational potential, as it provides users with a framework for evaluating information and encourages critical thinking.

The political-economic dimension of ownership and control of information is a particularly valuable part of the analysis, as it relates directly to transparency in media ownership. As stated, media owners can influence editorial policy and thereby place political or economic interests above professional reporting. In this way, ownership itself directly affects public opinion and shapes it in accordance with political or economic agendas, potentially undermining the public interest.

Media literacy is thus expanded from content analysis to the analysis of power structures. A distinction is made between personal and institutional ownership of content. The quality of information depends not only on the author, but also on the producer of the content and the dominant standards within the media environment. The dimension of ownership plays a key role in controlling information.

Results

The analyzed segment of the platform demonstrates several key characteristics:

1. Media literacy is defined as a set of concrete tools for verifying credibility.
2. The audience is portrayed as an active subject capable of critical analysis.
3. Professional media are defined through transparency, accountability, and institutional frameworks.
4. Fake media are presented as a problem linked to economic interests and political manipulation.
5. Ethics and ownership are treated as equally important as content.

This suggests that the platform does not merely promote the identification of falsehoods but develops a broader model of critical competence that includes understanding media economics, professional standards, and political context.

Two key conclusions emerge from the analysis:

1. The interaction of professional standards and transparency increases trust—authorial accountability and clear source attribution reduce opportunities for manipulation. Anonymity is identified as an early warning sign.
2. The audience as a regulator—participation by end-users enables additional content verification, though it may also introduce bias or manipulation, requiring critical monitoring and moderation.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the digital age, critical thinking is no longer merely an intellectual virtue but a fundamental mechanism for survival in an environment characterized by informational chaos. The analysis of the Media Literacy platform indicates that the

fight against disinformation cannot be won solely through fact-checking, but requires the education of individuals. The platform's educational value lies in clarifying the processes behind the production of media content.

When audiences understand that news is not a “natural phenomenon” but a constructed product shaped by specific intentions, their sensitivity to manipulation increases. Responsibility is thus distributed: media must adhere to professional codes, while audiences must consciously influence content consumption.

Based on the qualitative content analysis, the findings suggest the following:

H1 (supported): The platform largely frames media literacy as a “critical filter” based on constant verification practices. The emphasis on credibility assessment indicates that users are encouraged to approach media content with caution and evaluate information before accepting it as valid.

H2 (supported): The analysis indicates that critical thinking is primarily operationalized through strategies of message deconstruction. Through tools such as the 5W model and step-by-step verification guidelines, the platform promotes an analytical approach to news consumption and encourages users to identify missing information, unclear sources, and manipulative framing.

H3 (supported): The findings show that disinformation is frequently presented as a systemic issue rather than an isolated problem. It is framed as a phenomenon shaped by economic motivations, sensationalism, and emotional exploitation, which are linked to the attention-based logic of the digital media market.

Future research could proceed in several directions:

- **Comparative analysis** – Comparing regional platforms (e.g., Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro) to identify best practices in educational models.
- **Quantitative evaluation of effects** – Conducting empirical research to measure improvements in users' skills after engaging with educational platforms.
- **The role of artificial intelligence** – Examining how media literacy platforms can educate audiences about recognizing deepfake content and AI-generated disinformation.

The findings indicate that media literacy plays an important role in shaping more informed and critically oriented attitudes toward media content. In contemporary digital environments where information and manipulation are increasingly intertwined, critical awareness becomes a key protective competence for navigating media content.

Media literacy should be understood not as a fixed achievement, but as a continuous learning process shaped by changing media practices and technologies. The development of critical awareness contributes to strengthening the quality of public communication by supporting more responsible media consumption and reducing vulnerability to sensationalist and misleading content. Educational platforms of this type represent a valuable resource for strengthening media literacy

competencies; however, the practical application of these skills ultimately depends on individual users and their broader media environment.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single educational platform, which limits the generalizability of the findings and does not capture the diversity of media literacy initiatives across different contexts. Future research could address this by adopting a comparative approach.

Second, the study relies exclusively on qualitative content analysis and therefore examines the discursive and pedagogical construction of media literacy rather than its actual effects on audiences. It does not provide insight into how users interpret or apply the presented concepts in practice. Audience-based methods, such as interviews or surveys, could complement this approach.

Third, the analysis was conducted by a single coder, which limits the assessment of intercoder reliability. Although consistency was ensured through systematic coding and iterative refinement, a degree of subjectivity remains inherent in qualitative analysis.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of digital media environments means that platform content and disinformation practices may change over time, potentially affecting the longer-term relevance of the findings.

References

- Adjin-Tettey, E. (2022). Media literacy and the identification of misinformation. In K. Voityvych, M. Kitsa, & I. Mudra (Eds.), *Media literacy and information resilience* (pp. 1–15). MDPI. <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-5172/6/4/188>
- Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Polity Press. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242298855_Chapter_Three_of_Media_Education_Literacy_Learning_and_Contemporary_Culture
- Guess, A. M., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2020). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 U.S. election. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(5), 472–480. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0833-x>
- Hobbs, R. (2010). *Digital and media literacy: A plan of action*. The Aspen Institute. <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8Z036H5>
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. In D. Macedo & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader* (pp. 3–23). Peter Lang. https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/2007_Kellner-Share-Steinberg%20and%20Macedo_ch1.pdf
- Lenoir, T., & Anderson, A. A. (2023). The social dimensions of misinformation resilience: Beyond technical fixes. *Public Relations Review*, 49(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2023.102334>

- Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490280152>
- McDougall, J. (2019a). Information disorder and media education: A critical approach to misinformation and “fake news”. *Media Literacy Studies Journal*, 12(1), 30–45. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/228122868.pdf>
- McDougall, J. (2019b). Media literacy versus fake news: Critical thinking, resilience and civic engagement. *Media Studies*, 10(19), 29–45. <https://doi.org/10.20901/ms.10.19.2>
- Mihailidis, P. (2014). *Media literacy and the emerging citizen: Youth, engagement and participation in digital culture*. Peter Lang. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330888821_Media_Literacy_and_the_Emerging_Citizen_Youth_Engagement_and_Participation_in_Digital_Culture
- Milošević, J. (2023). Kritička pedagogija: Medijska pismenost i kritičko mišljenje [Critical pedagogy: Media literacy and critical thinking]. *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti*, 44, 171–175. https://doi.org/10.18485/fdu_zr.2023.44.12
- Potter, W. J. (2008). *Media literacy*. Sage Publications. https://archive.org/details/medialiteracy0000pott_t0v8
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). Analyses of articles categorized as dissemination of false news. *Raskrinkavanje.ba*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analize-sa-clancima-kategorisanim-kao-prenosenje-laznih-vijesti>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). Basic elements of a media report. *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/koji-su-osnovni-elementi-medijskog-izvjestaja>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). Basic types of media texts. *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/koji-su-osnovni-tipovi-medijskih-tekstova>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). Fake news. *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/oblici-manipulacija-i-kome-se-obratiti-ako-ih-uocite/koji-sve-oblici-medijskih-manipulacija-postoje/lazna-vijest/>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). How to recognize credible media. *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). How to recognize credible news. *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). Media literacy portal. *Raskrinkavanje.ba*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). What is media ethics? *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/sta-je-medijska-etika>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). What is the difference between real and fake media? *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije/koja-je-razlika-izmedu-pravih-i-laznih-medija>

- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). What should the media be like? *Raskrinkavanje.ba*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit>
- Raskrinkavanje. (2026). Who owns the media and why is it important? *Media Literacy*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije/u-cijem-suvlasnistvu-mediji-i-zasto-je-to-vazno>
- Tandoc, E. C., Jr., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining “fake news”: A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>
- Vraga, E. K., & Bode, L. (2017). Using expert sources to correct health misinformation in social media. *Science Communication*, 39(5), 621–645. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547017731776>
- Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>

Appendix

Corpus of Analyzed Texts

N=11	Title	URL	Topic / Focus
1	Media literacy portal	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/	General media literacy overview
2	What should the media be like?	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit	Characteristics of good media
3	How to recognize credible media	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije	Identifying trustworthy media
4	Difference between real and fake media	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije/koja-je-razlika-izmedu-pravih-i-laznih-medija	Comparing authentic vs. fake media
5	Who owns the media and why it matters	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije/u-cijem-suvlasnistvu-mediji-i-zasto-je-to-vazno	Media ownership and influence
6	How to recognize credible news	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest	Identifying credible news articles
7	Basic elements of a media report	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/koji-su-osnovni-elementi-medijskog-izvjestaja	Components of a media report
8	Basic types of media texts	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/koji-su-osnovni-tipovi-medijskih-tekstova	Types of media content

N=11	Title	URL	Topic / Focus
9	What is media ethics?	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/sta-je-medijska-etika	Principles of ethical journalism
10	Fake news	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/oblici-manipulacija-i-kome-se-obratiti-ako-ih-uocite/koji-sve-oblici-medijskih-manipulacija-postoje/lazna-vijest/	Forms of media manipulation
11	Analyses of articles categorized as dissemination of false news	https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analize-sa-clancima-kategorisanim-kao-prenosenje-laznih-vijesti	Case studies of fake news

Informacija ili manipulacija: Medijska pismenost kao kritička kompetencija (kvalitativna analiza sadržaja platforme *Medijska pismenost*)

Anja Savić, Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Nišu, Srbija
 Milica Jović, Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Nišu, Srbija

Sažetak

Promenama u svom okruženju čovek bi trebalo da se prilagodi – medijskim opismenjavanjem i publike i medija uz razvijanje kritičke svesti. Ovaj rad ispituje ulogu medijske pismenosti u razvoju kritičkog mišljenja u savremenom digitalnom medijskom okruženju. Cilj istraživanja je da analizira način na koji specijalizovane obrazovne platforme, konkretno veb-sajt *Medijska pismenost* (*Medijska pismenost*), konceptualizuju medijsku pismenost, kritički pristupaju interpretaciji medijskih sadržaja, identifikuju dezinformacije, manipulacije i lažne vesti. U digitalnom okruženju, koje karakteriše hiperprodukcija sadržaja, kritičko mišljenje postaje nužan mehanizam zaštite od dezinformacija i manipulacije medijskim sadržajem. Zbog toga se postavlja ključno pitanje ovog istraživanja, a to je: „Na koji način platforma *Medijska pismenost* konceptualizuje i operacionalizuje medijsku pismenost kao pedagošku praksu?“ Istraživački fokus rada je analiza segmenata sajta *Medijska pismenost* (<https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/>). Metodološki okvir obuhvata kvalitativnu analizu sadržaja, primenjenu na odabrane edukativne tekstove koji se bave medijskim manipulacijama, dezinformacijama, fact-checking praksama, ulogom publike i kritičkom interpretacijom medijskih poruka.

Ključne reči: Medijska pismenost, Kritičko mišljenje, Medijska edukacija, Fact-checking

Received: 6th March 2026
 Revision received: 7th April 2026
 Accepted: 7th April 2026

Video Streaming Technology and Its Impact on the Media Ecosystem of the 21st Century

Ilija Milosavljević¹², Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Dragana Pavlović³, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

Video streaming technology has emerged as one of the most significant phenomena of the digital era, transforming the media ecosystem and reshaping how audiences access content. This paper explores the origins, characteristics, and types of video streaming, as well as the technological and social conditions that have enabled its development. It analyzes key video streaming models, including on-demand streaming, live streaming, and hybrid formats, with particular attention to VOD platforms such as Netflix and YouTube. The study discusses major changes in the media landscape driven by this technology, including shifts in business models, the globalization of media corporations, and the rise of new content creators. Special attention is given to the impact on audience habits, the development of recommendation algorithms, and challenges such as piracy and regulatory issues.

Keywords: video streaming, media ecosystem, digital transformation, media corporations, audience habits

Video Streaming Technology and Its Impact on the Media Ecosystem of the 21st Century

Introduction

The continuous development of digital technologies over the past three decades has gradually enabled the emergence of various platforms. Every new possibility, such as networking, content sharing and downloading, written communication exchange, online data storage, and many others, was quickly adopted and developed in different ways upon its inception. Consequently, the nature of the digital sphere has become increasingly complex, as each feature has led to the branching and definition of one or more new sub-spheres with specific characteristics and diverse applications. Simultaneously, due to its convergent and multimedia nature, each of these new spheres has remained closely connected to the others.

¹ Corresponding author: ilija.milosavljevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

² ORCID: 0000-0003-2341-7637

³ ORCID: 0000-0002-5115-8698

Therefore, while many contemporary studies of digital technologies rightly focus on the digital world as a whole, it is essential to emphasize that this realm consists of numerous interconnected elements. Each element evolves both independently and in coordination with others, bringing about new changes and possibilities that, in turn, pave the way for further innovations and transformations.

One of the innovations that has significantly enriched the digital sphere is the phenomenon of streaming. This now widely accepted element of the digital world, particularly popularized through streaming platforms like YouTube and Netflix, marked a historical turning point in how society interacts with online content. This change was so significant that some authors, somewhat optimistically, declared the “end of broadcasting” as early as the beginning of the millennium (Bhandari et al., 2000). While that prediction did not come true, the following years undoubtedly saw the beginning of a transformation in how media content is created and consumed (Krikke, 2004), along with changes in audience habits (Burroughs, 2015).

The goal of this paper is to examine the streaming phenomenon, systematize and present the conditions that needed to be met for this technology to be considered mainstream, with a particular focus on video streaming, and highlight some of the most significant changes in the media world driven by this technology.

Origin, Characteristics, and Types of Media Streaming

The term “streaming” comes from the English word “stream,” meaning “flow of water” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d.), and refers to a technique and technological process of continuous real-time content distribution to users without requiring downloading (Kozamernik, 2002; Maciejewski, Fischer, Roginska, 2014). The term was first used in the 1970s, developed as a concept in the 1980s, but its practical application only occurred in the 1990s.

The primary feature of this technique is online access to content, meaning access without the permanent transfer of data to the user’s computer device, regardless of the technological means that ensure such transfer is avoided or managed afterward (Maciejewski, Fischer, Roginska, 2014:10). This is a critical distinction that sets streaming apart from other methods of content exchange and access—namely downloading, where users must first download and store content on their devices before viewing or interacting with it (Wu et al., 2001).

The most significant distinctions between streaming and downloading are:

1. Live content transmission: Streaming enables live content delivery without requiring download time.
2. No storage space required: Content does not occupy device memory, removing storage limitations.
3. Internet speed optimization: Streaming uses only the internet speed necessary for real-time transmission.
4. Combining with non-streaming content: Streaming can be integrated with other types of content.
5. Targeted distribution: The same content can be distributed simultaneously to a large, targeted audience (Kozamernik, 2002).

Thus, streaming is a much faster method, reliant solely on a predetermined internet connection speed rather than storage capacity. Moreover, the process can be more tightly controlled by the distributor, especially regarding access permissions and intended audiences, unlike downloading, where content formally leaves the distributor's control once downloaded.

Owing to these innovations, streaming quickly found applications across various fields and in diverse ways. Hendrik Storstein Spilker and Terje Colbjørnsen identify five dimensions—or ten types—of modern **media streaming and its usage**:

1. Professional vs. User-Generated Streaming (Creator Perspective): The key difference lies in whether content is provided by amateurs or professionals, institutions, and organizations in the relevant field.
2. Legal vs. Pirated Streaming (Copyright Perspective): Is the distributed content owned by the distributor, or is it pirated?
3. On-Demand vs. Live Streaming (Content Type Perspective): Is the content broadcast live, or does the user select (demand) specific content from an existing database?
4. Single-Purpose vs. Multi-Purpose Platforms (Platform Type Perspective): Is the streaming technique used solely for one purpose, or does it have multiple uses and applications?
5. Niche vs. Broad Audience Streaming (Audience Perspective): Is the content intended for a broad audience or a specific niche segment? (Spilker & Colbjørnsen, 2020).

Combining different dimensions reveals various forms, types, and applications of this technology, including different types of streamers and streaming services. However, another essential dimension for fully conceptualizing streaming use is the type of content. While the term is now mostly associated with distributing video materials, it equally applies to other forms like audio content (Spotify), text (Google Books, Kindle), and e-information (Google Maps) due to the high convergence of the digital world (Maciejewski, Fischer, Roginska, 2014). In fact, video streaming is the latest development in this technology, preceded by various historical and technological conditions.

Historical and Technological Conditions of Streaming's Emergence

The idea of streaming as a simultaneous transmission or flow, which audiences can join and adjust to their needs, is not new. Raymond Williams, in his analysis of television, recognized this concept long ago (Williams, 1974). As Benjamin Burroughs explains, streaming is as much culturally as it is technologically driven, with many historical attempts at creating streaming-like systems. He mentions Thomas Edison's telephonoscope, live music broadcasts over the phone, early radio transmissions, and the press's efforts to create their streaming equivalents (Burroughs, 2019).

While television and radio partially satisfied audience needs at certain points in history, they fell short of offering personalized experiences, and modifying

or selecting content flow was nearly impossible. True streaming only became possible when specific technological conditions were met, primarily through digital technologies like computers and the internet. Yet, these alone were insufficient—specific software and hardware solutions had to be developed. On the software side, streaming consists of browsers, web pages, algorithms, formats, and compression software that enable the smooth flow of interoperable content between software and hardware. The hardware includes desktop computers, laptops, iPads, mobile phones, and internet-connected set-top boxes (Burroughs, 2019:2).

Furthermore, these solutions needed to reach a certain level, particularly concerning video streaming. The three most significant advancements enabling streaming's rise in computer technology are often cited as:

1. Development of high-quality video and audio compression.
2. Development of streaming servers.
3. Advancements in internet speed for both uploading and downloading data (Kozamernik, 2002; Hartsell, Yuen, 2006).

These aspects are crucial due to how streaming functions. Raw (uncompressed) video and audio files are enormous and take up vast amounts of memory. Since the quality provided by these large formats is unnecessary for personal devices, effective compression methods were developed to preserve satisfactory quality while significantly reducing file size.

Encoded and compressed content is transmitted over the internet using specific protocols that ensure addressing (Internet Protocol - IP), data transfer (User Datagram Protocol - UDP), and control (Real-Time Streaming Protocol - RTSP). The user's device receives, decodes, and plays the content using the same protocols (Wu, et al., 2001:283).

It is essential to note that, despite the term “streaming”, this transfer is not continuous. Data is sent in small packets rather than in a steady flow. As each packet is played, new packets are downloaded, while previously played packets are erased from internal memory, creating the illusion of continuous streaming (Hartsell, Yuen, 2006:36; Colbjørnsen, 2020:4). This process underscores the importance of a good internet speed to maintain an uninterrupted stream. Additionally, processing power and data processing speed are critical. If either is insufficient, the transfer will be disrupted, causing playback delays or buffering (Shattuc, 2020:145-146).

The required data distribution and processing speed, along with compression levels, depend on the type of content being streamed. Historically, audio streaming flourished in the 1990s, leading to numerous internet-only radio stations by the next decade (Spilker, Colbjørnsen, 2020). Audio compression is much simpler, with a minimum data transfer speed of 0.256 megabits per second (Mbps) (Thompson, 2020).

Although there were successful video streaming attempts in the 1990s, video streaming only became widely accessible in the mid-2000s with platforms like YouTube (Spilker, Colbjørnsen, 2020). The delay compared to audio streaming stems from the fact that even with modern compression, video streaming requires

between one and several dozen megabits per second (Christiansen, 2022).

Today, these speeds are standard worldwide, enabling rapid video streaming growth. A decade ago, video streaming became the fastest-growing internet usage segment, accounting for over 30% of all internet traffic related to entertainment (West, 2014). Recent research shows it now accounts for 70% of internet activities and is projected to surpass 80% by 2027 (Ericsson, 2022).

Video Streaming – Types and Specificities

The primary reason behind the widespread popularity of video streaming lies in its versatile applications. Fundamentally, video streaming can be divided into on-demand streaming, live streaming, and a hybrid model combining both — live-to-video-on-demand streaming. In the first case, content stored on servers is accessed as needed; in the second, videos are processed and distributed simultaneously as they are recorded, remaining accessible only during that timeframe. The third model is a mix, where recordings are distributed while being filmed but also stored for later on-demand access (Li et al. 2021). Each of these techniques is actively used in modern communication, information dissemination, and data transmission.

Xiangbo Li, with his associates, highlights four distinct models and their applications in live streaming:

One-to-One – Used in video calls and chats, characterized by low image quality and slight communication delay.

One-to-Many – A single person broadcasts live video to numerous viewers, such as live streams on Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube. This includes individuals and websites that legally or illegally stream live television (Lobato, 2019:8).

Many-to-One – Multiple cameras send video feeds to a single user, commonly used in surveillance systems.

Many-to-Many – Multiple users from different locations stream live video to a broader audience, typical in video conferencing (Li et al. 2021:204-205).

These models share transactional, ephemeral characteristics, accessible only during the live broadcast. Users must be notified of the broadcast time in advance and be present at that specific moment, making live streaming suitable mainly for occasional, short-term events and interactions.

In contrast, video-on-demand (VOD), always accessible at the user's convenience, offers entirely different applications. This system, often referred to as OTT (Over-the-Top) media, delivers video content via the internet, bypassing traditional broadcasting, cable, or satellite distribution (Kim, Baek, Kim, 2021). Interpretations of what constitutes OTT distribution vary: some consider only VOD as OTT, while others include both VOD and live streaming (Chalaby, Plunkett, 2021:3211). These features, among others inherent to digital media, have led to discussions about VOD services as drivers of the post-television era (Radošinská, 2017; Tana, Eirola, Nylund, 2020:108). While predominantly used for entertainment, series, and film distribution, they are also applied in education, internet TV, and related systems (Li et al. 2021:204).

VOD services are commonly categorized based on their operational and business models:

1. **TVOD (Transactional Video-on-Demand)** – Content distribution based on transactions. Users pay fees to purchase or rent individual content for a specific time (Lobato, 2019:8). Examples include iTunes and Google Play Store (Baschiera, Re, 2019:2).
2. **AVOD (Advertising-Based Video-on-Demand)** – Free or lower-cost access supported by advertisements, often algorithmically targeted (Vašíčková, Szczepanik, 2018). YouTube's basic version is a classic AVOD example.
3. **SVOD (Subscription-Based Video-on-Demand)** – Users pay a monthly subscription fee for access to the service's entire content library (Lobato, 2019:8). Popular platforms include Netflix, Disney+, and Amazon Prime Video.
4. **IPTV (Internet Protocol Television)** – Provides television broadcasting services over the internet, often highly regulated. IPTV combines standard TV with features like rewinding, VOD, and video clubs (Juluri, Tamarapalli, Medhi, 2015:1-2). Examples include EON and ORION Telekom in Serbia.
5. **Hybrids** – Platforms operating through multiple models or combinations. These platforms, unlike others focused on professional content, often include user-generated content (Lobato, 2019:8). YouTube Premium exemplifies such hybrids.

The last two models represent the hybrid streaming type combining live and VOD features. They are essential when discussing SVOD services due to the unique opportunities they provide and their competition with other models.

Regardless of their type, all VOD services, along with social networking platforms, have comprehensively integrated digital world dimensions. They utilize numerical video representation, convergence, content compression, global internet distribution, and interactive audience engagement. Users can actively choose and personalize content based on their preferences. Additionally, a critical element of VOD platforms is creating extensive databases of user activities and feeding these data into recommendation algorithms. Thus, VOD services are a near-perfect product of the digital ecosystem, showcasing how its elements function together in practice. Simultaneously, streaming itself has brought numerous innovations and transformative changes to the media landscape.

Changes in the Media World Driven by Video Streaming

The primary innovation introduced by streaming in the media sphere is the transition in the way content is distributed. Instead of terrestrial or satellite broadcasters of television and radio signals, or, in a more radical case, printing and physically

distributing newspapers, the globally accessible internet network, through streaming technology, has become a universal means of immediate content distribution. This method is not only faster and more widely available than all previous ones but is also significantly cheaper. As a result, two continuous trends have emerged: the creation of global media conglomerates and new types of distributors on the one hand, and the rise of a large number of new content creators on the other.

As internet distribution replaced mass broadcasting, particularly in the case of television, national borders lost their significance in defining the areas where content would be broadcast, allowing many media outlets to become global media conglomerates relatively quickly through this transition. Naturally, this shift required significant changes in operational methods. As Jean Chalaby and Steve Plunkett explain, large media companies quickly integrated VOD systems into their offerings but also realized that the distribution and creation of content did not have to rely on a strict vertical hierarchy, where the corporation controls every segment of production. Instead, external collaborators could be engaged to address both content delivery and creation issues. Media companies began outsourcing a significant portion of their content production and distribution processes (Chalaby, Plunkett, 2021). These changes enabled the rise of new global media corporations that have used streaming as the foundation of their business, including well-known platforms such as Hulu, Amazon Prime, Netflix, and HBO.

It was not solely new, large companies that emerged as a result of streaming; individuals, amateurs, and citizen journalists also found space to capture public attention. The financial accessibility of streaming equipment, combined with simultaneous distribution and the potential for a vast audience, enabled individuals to become nationally and globally visible and relevant. Notably, this includes popular influencers and YouTubers, modern opinion leaders whose audiences often number in the thousands. Behind this phenomenon is the public's need for fast, up-to-date, and specialized responses to current events, whether for information, education, or entertainment. Still, these changes are neither one-dimensional nor truly democratic. Although SVOD models have long been regarded as the dominant paradigm in the streaming industry, prevailing market conditions between 2024 and 2026 reveal signs of market saturation and a strategic pivot toward hybrid monetization approaches. Confronted with escalating production costs and subscriber churn, major platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ have introduced lower-priced, advertising-supported tiers. This development effectively erodes the traditional distinction between AVOD and SVOD frameworks. This process of platformization within the media sector underscores a profound degree of economic concentration (Chalaby, 2025), wherein the long-term viability of operations no longer depends solely on content quality. Instead, sustainability increasingly hinges on platforms' capacity to monetize user data and sustain user attention within closed, proprietary ecosystems.

At first glance, it seems that traditional media systems cannot compete with the streaming community, where there is always an individual or group that is closer to the event, better understands it, or can present it in a more interesting way than any media outlet could. In fact, when it comes to journalism and streaming, several significant changes have occurred:

1. There are no longer any limitations in terms of deadlines and formats of journalistic texts.
2. Geography becomes less relevant for gathering information, creating, and distributing journalistic products.
3. Data flows and live social activities provide new and unfiltered raw materials.
4. Real-time feedback influences stories.
5. Individuals become more significant than brands (Anderson, Bell, Shirky, 2015:41).

Thus, it is not without merit to argue that individuals or groups streaming content can have a greater impact on the global public than large media corporations. This argument is supported by the fact that, in the summer of 2022, CNN, as the most followed media company on YouTube, had around 14 million followers (Maher, 2022), while Felix Kjellberg (PewDiePie), an individual, had 111 million followers on the same platform (Le Guyader, 2022). Of course, the content they distribute is not the same, and it should be noted that CNN also has other distribution channels, but this comparison highlights the impact streaming can have on shifting the balance of global communication power. Although platforms such as YouTube have indeed democratized access to content creation and distribution, contemporary visibility for creators is rigorously conditioned by algorithmic gatekeeping, whereby recommendation algorithms, rather than traditional editors, determine the allocation of attention and influence (Esteve-del-Valle, Sarchosakis, 2025). These systems frequently prioritize sensationalism or advertiser-friendly content to maximize engagement metrics and platform revenue, thereby reshaping content production incentives.

Individual creators thus operate in a state of persistent precarity, where abrupt modifications to monetization policies, algorithmic updates, or platform code can instantaneously diminish their reach and economic viability (Bidav, 2025). Concurrently, some established professional media organizations have not remained inert; they have proactively incorporated streaming technologies into their vertically integrated hierarchies, leveraging these tools for direct-to-audience distribution, enhanced interactivity, and sustained audience retention amid broader platform competition.

However, it is not merely media organizations and the news industry as a whole that have undergone changes due to the emergence of new methods of content transmission. The same has occurred with the “central creative industries” - film, music, and books (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, according to Sundet, Lüders, 2022:4). The basic business models, which relied on cinema distribution and the sale of physical copies of records, disks, and printed books, have been replaced by digital copies and online reproduction. Michael Smith and Raul Telang argue that the period of technological development is simultaneously the best and the worst for creative industries. On the one hand, similar to the information sector, it has enabled many small and unknown authors to publicly express and showcase their works

and creativity. However, the same technologies have also changed the competitive landscape, weakened the control established players had over content and consumers, and forced business leaders to make tough compromises between old business models and new business opportunities (Smith, Telang, 2016:3). Thus, instead of releasing records and disks, the music industry turned to profitable music streaming platforms, while film, especially television series, largely shifted from TV to VOD platforms. Publishing also pivoted to digital or audio versions of books. The length of songs, the transition from album releases to exclusive single releases, the timing of film releases, genre orientation, narrative structure techniques in series, and, especially, the definition of content and marketing and promotional communication strategies in these industries, have all been completely redefined (Smith, Telang, 2016: Herbert, Lotz, Marshall, 2019; Sundet, Lüders, 2022). Additionally, it is essential to consider another complicating factor for all these industries - the extremely simple piracy and the emergence of illegal copies in the streaming environment. Beyond piracy, a central challenge in the 21st-century media landscape lies in the inherent tension between global streaming platforms and national regulatory frameworks. While these platforms operate seamlessly across borders, states have increasingly enacted measures grounded in digital sovereignty or cultural sovereignty (Tambini, 2025), compelling global players to allocate a percentage of profits toward local production or to adhere to stringent quotas promoting domestic language, culture, and content. Such conflicts, centered on licensing, copyright management, and content investment, underscore that the contemporary media ecosystem is not merely a technological domain but a contested political arena in which struggles for control over cultural narratives unfold. These regulatory interventions reflect broader efforts to safeguard national cultural identities against the homogenizing tendencies of transnational platforms, even as they raise questions about trade relations, market efficiency, and the balance between global accessibility and local cultural preservation.

The audience did not take long to adapt to these changes. The sense of mobility, the need for interactive access to desired content at any time and from any place, has dramatically increased, particularly among the younger population (Sundet, Lüders, 2022). It is crucial that this instant access has diminished the need for permanent ownership of physical or digital copies and replaced it with the need for access to content (Herbert, Lotz, Marshall, 2019:4-5). However, the problem with this system is that access to certain content today does not guarantee that it will be available forever (of course, with a paid subscription). There can be many reasons for this, from the expiration of broadcasting rights on a particular platform to legal changes, or simply replacing one version of a series, film, or song with a new one where certain parts are removed, altered, or cut. Nevertheless, if we consider the number of users and subscribers of video streaming services, the impression is that they are not particularly concerned or aware of this issue. On the other hand, the lack or absence of advertisements, the possibility of unlimited viewing of desired content without interruptions, known as binge-watching, and the vast libraries of available content that, with the help of algorithms, are recommended based on user preferences, have led to additional consequences. The peak viewing

time for streaming services is significantly different from that on television and, according to various studies, most often occurs between 9 PM and 4 AM. This, particularly among the younger population, often results in a reduction of melatonin levels, increased obesity and cardiovascular problems, sleep deprivation, and fatigue (Tana, Eerola, Nynland, 2020). On the other hand, some studies have highlighted the significant role of streaming techniques in learning, meetings, and debates, offering better understanding of material and more comprehensive skill development (Liu, Hung, 2020). This method has proven particularly useful in distance learning, which became widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

These are just some of the key changes and observations related to streaming in the broadest sense, which various academic disciplines have explored in recent years. One might also assume, for example, that the advent of streaming accelerated the development and use of personal computers by several years, as it does not require memory space. This allowed many users to transition from slower and cheaper hard disk drives (HDD) with large memory space (which is unnecessary for streaming) to faster solid-state drives (SSD), which, in their cheaper variants, provide less space but enable two to three times the speed in data access and transfer (Brant, 2022). All areas of transformation—from computers to information industries, the arts, and entertainment, as well as the audience—strongly support the argument that streaming is indeed a revolutionary technology that has changed the way society functions. While these transitions may seem abrupt, they have occurred gradually, owing to the popularization of this new method of data, content, information, and communication transmission in general.

Conclusion

Although digital technologies, which contemporary society relies on today, seem commonplace and self-understood, they are the result of innovations and advancements across various hardware, software, and social fields. Similarly, streaming technology is not the product of a single moment but rather a process that has gradually embedded itself into the global media system. Understanding the conditions under which streaming emerged, along with its distinctive features, types, and innovations it directly introduced, as well as the conditions that prevailed before it, is of imperative importance for any serious analysis. Only from these conclusions can the transformations in communication, media, audiences, habits, and practices, which today represent the normal communicative environment, be observed.

This understanding is essential not only in academic and scientific contexts but also in broader societal frameworks, as it forms the foundation for all future research in this field. On the other hand, neglecting the history, changes, and contextual specifics of contemporary media and technologies - which is characteristic of the fast-paced nature of modern communication and existence - can lead to the trivialization of these important topics or, worse, to the inability to comprehend new changes, which will have their foundations precisely in these developments. Furthermore, the

lack of deeper discussion regarding streaming, a phenomenon that marked the first two decades of the 21st century, could result in the inability to understand and, more crucially, to predict new transformations in the pandigital world.

The transformation brought by streaming goes far beyond a mere technological shift from traditional broadcasting to on-demand access. It represents a profound redefinition of the political economy of media itself. Algorithms have emerged as the new gatekeepers, determining visibility and influence in ways that often eclipse the role once played by human editors or broadcasters. At the same time, national regulators and legacy media giants are actively renegotiating their positions in an ongoing struggle over digital sovereignty and cultural sovereignty.

References

- Anderson, C. W., Bell, E., & Shirky, C. (2015). Post-industrial journalism: Adapting to the present. *Geopolitics, History and International Relations*, 7(2), 32.
- Bhandari, A., Biglari, H., Burstein, M., Dua, A., & Rose, J. (2000). The end of broadcast?. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, (3), 138.
- Bidav, T. (2025). Localised precarity in social media entertainment: YouTubing in Turkey. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 28(1), 133-150.
- Brant, T. (2022). SSD vs. HDD: What's the difference?. *PCMag*. Retrieved from <https://www.pcmag.com/news/ssd-vs-hdd-whats-the-difference>
- Burroughs, B. (2019). A cultural lineage of streaming. *Internet Histories*, 3(2), 147-161.
- Burroughs, B. E. (2015). *Streaming media: Audience and industry shifts in a networked society*. The University of Iowa.
- Chalaby, J. K. (2025). Streaming giants and the global shift: building value chains and remapping trade flows. *Journal of Communication*, 75(2), 112-124.
- Chalaby, J. K., & Plunkett, S. (2021). Standing on the shoulders of tech giants: Media delivery, streaming television and the rise of global suppliers. *New Media & Society*, 23(11), 3206-3228.
- Christiansen, P. (2022). How much speed do I need to stream video? *High Speed Internet*. Retrieved from <https://www.highspeedinternet.com/resources/how-much-speed-do-i-need-to-watch-netflix-and-hulu>
- Ericsson. (2022). *Ericsson mobility report*. Executive Editor: Peter Jonsson. Retrieved from <https://www.ericsson.com/4ae28d/assets/local/reports-papers/mobility-report/documents/2022/ericsson-mobility-report-november-2022.pdf>
- Esteve-del-Valle, M., & Sarchosakis, F. A. (2025). The “algorithmic gatekeeper”: how Dutch farmers’ use of YouTube curates their views on the nitrogen crisis. *Sustainability*, 17(8), 3347.
- Hartsell, T., & Yuen, S. (2006). Video streaming in online learning. *AACE Journal*, 14(1), 31-43.
- Herbert, D., Lotz, A. D., & Marshall, L. (2019). Approaching media industries comparatively: A case study of streaming. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(3), 349-366.

- Juluri, P., Tamarapalli, V., & Medhi, D. (2015). Measurement of quality of experience of video-on-demand services: A survey. *IEEE Communications Surveys & Tutorials*, 18(1), 401-418.
- Kim, S., Baek, H., & Kim, D. H. (2021). OTT and live streaming services: Past, present, and future. *Telecommunications Policy*, 45(9), 102244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2021.102244>
- Kozamernik, F. (2002). Media streaming over the Internet — an overview of delivery technologies. *EBU Technical Review*. Retrieved from https://tech.ebu.ch/docs/techreview/trev_292-kozamernik.pdf
- Krikke, J. (2004). Streaming video transforms the media industry. *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*, 24(4), 6-12. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MCG.2004.17>
- Le Guyader, K. (2022). The most popular YouTubers of 2022. *Influence4You Blog*. Retrieved from <https://blog.influence4you.com/the-most-popular-youtubers-of-2022/>
- Li, X., Darwich, M., Salehi, M. A., & Bayoumi, M. (2021). A survey on cloud-based video streaming services. In *Advances in Computers, Vol. 123* (pp. 193-244). Elsevier.
- Liu, I. F., & Hung, H. C. (2020). How are live-streaming services and social media platforms changing on-job MBA students' learning? A case study for applying e-case live in management case-based learning in Taiwan. *IEEE Access*, 8, 120936-120945. Retrieved from <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=9129698>
- Lobato, R. (2019). *Netflix nations: The geography of digital distribution*. New York: New York University Press; London: Routledge.
- Maciejewski, M., Fischer, N. I. C., & Roginska, Y. (2014). Streaming and online access to content and services. *European Parliament*. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/492435/IPOL-IMCO_ET\(2014\)492435_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/492435/IPOL-IMCO_ET(2014)492435_EN.pdf) <https://doi.org/10.2861/32239>
- Maher, B. (2022). Revealed: The biggest English-language news outlets on YouTube and their most popular videos. *Press Gazette*. Retrieved from <https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/biggest-news-youtube/>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Stream. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stream>
- Online Etymology Dictionary. (n.d.). Stream. In *Etymology Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=stream>
- Radošinská, J. (2017). New trends in production and distribution of episodic television drama: Brand Marvel-Netflix in the post-television era. *Communication Today*, 8(1), 4-29.
- Shattuc, J. (2020). Netflix, Inc. and online television. In Wasko, J., & Meehan, E. R. (Eds.), *A companion to television* (pp. 145-164). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119269465.ch7>
- Smith, M. D., & Telang, R. (2016). *Streaming, sharing, stealing: Big data and the future of entertainment*. MIT Press.
- Spilker, H. S., & Colbjørnsen, T. (2020). The dimensions of streaming: Toward a typology of an evolving concept. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(7-8), 1210-1225.

- Sundet, V. S., & Lüders, M. (2022). "Young people are on YouTube": Industry notions on streaming and youth as a new media generation. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 1-18.
- Tambini, D. (2025). The "Netflix effect" revisited: OTT video, media globalization and digital sovereignty in 4 countries. *Telecommunications Policy*, 49(5), 102935.
- Tana, J., Eirola, E., & Nylund, M. (2020). When is prime-time in streaming media platforms and video-on-demand services? New media consumption patterns and real-time economy. *European Journal of Communication*, 35(2), 108-125.
- Thompson, A. (2020). How much speed does audio streaming services need. *Blusky Software*. Retrieved from <https://bluskysoftware.com/speed-test/how-much-speed-does-audio-streaming-services-need/>
- West, D. M. (2014). The evolution of video streaming and digital content delivery. *Center for Technology Innovation at Brookings*. Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/05/02-video-streaming/west-evolution-ofvideostreaming-anddigital-contentdelivery-final.pdf>
- Williams, R. (1974). *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. New York Routledge
- Wu, D., Hou, Y. T., Zhu, W., Zhang, Y. Q., & Peha, J. M. (2001). Streaming video over the Internet: Approaches and directions. *IEEE Transactions on Circuits and Systems for Video Technology*, 11(3), 282-300.

Tehnologija video striminga i njen uticaj na medijski ekosistem 21. veka

Ilija Milosavljević, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Dragana Pavlović, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Tehnologija video striminga pojavila se kao jedan od najznačajnijih fenomena digitalne ere, transformišući medijski ekosistem i menjajući način na koji publika pristupa sadržajima. Ovaj rad istražuje poreklo, karakteristike i tipove video striminga, kao i tehnološke i društvene uslove koji su omogućili njegov razvoj. Analiziraju se ključni modeli video striminga, uključujući striming na zahtev, prenos uživo i hibridne formate, sa posebnim osvrtom na VOD platforme poput Netfliksa i Jutjuba. Studija razmatra glavne promene u medijskom pejzažu koje su proizašle iz razvoja ove tehnologije, uključujući transformaciju poslovnih modela, globalizaciju medijskih korporacija i uspon novih stvaralaca sadržaja. Posebna pažnja posvećena je uticaju na navike publike, razvoju algoritama za preporuke i izazovima kao što su piraterija i regulatorna pitanja.

Ključne reči: video striming, medijski ekosistem, digitalna transformacija, medijske korporacije, navike publike.

Received: 21st February 2026

Revision received: 6th March 2026

Accepted: 6th March 2026

Artificial Intelligence as a Medium: Ethical and Discursive Implications

Irina Filipović¹², Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

This paper analyzes artificial intelligence as a medium from the perspective of pragmatic media philosophy, focusing on its ethical and discursive implications in contemporary communication processes. Moving beyond instrumental views of technology, the study conceptualizes AI as a communication infrastructure that actively shapes meaning production, the distribution of visibility, and power relations within media environments. The study adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach based on conceptual analysis of interdisciplinary literature from media philosophy, platform studies, and empirical research on artificial intelligence in communication. Within this framework, the paper examines transformations of communicative practices, particularly in relation to authorship, responsibility, and persuasion, as well as key ethical dimensions such as power, surveillance, and transparency. Special attention is given to the discursive implications of AI, analyzed through the interconnected concepts of transparency, truth, and trust. The analysis shows that algorithmic and generative systems influence not only the content of communication, but also the ways in which credibility is assessed and trust is formed.

The findings suggest that ethical and discursive challenges cannot be reduced to isolated cases of misuse or technical limitations, but should be understood as structural effects of algorithmically mediated communication systems. The paper concludes that conceptualizing AI as a medium enables a deeper understanding of contemporary communication processes and highlights the need to integrate ethical reflection into everyday communicative practices, with particular emphasis on transparency, accountability, and the protection of user autonomy.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, ethics, media philosophy, algorithmic governance, digital marketing

Artificial Intelligence as a Medium: Ethical and Discursive Implications

Introduction

Digital communication has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, with artificial intelligence (AI) becoming an integral part of the media and

¹ Corresponding author: irina.filipovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

² ORCID: 0009-0007-2433-1794

communication environment. AI can no longer be understood merely as an external addition to communication processes. Instead, it functions as a framework that shapes how communication is organized, how content becomes visible, and how different actors interact within contemporary media environments (Pierson et al., 2023).

Recent research further supports this view by describing AI as a structural actor within the digital media ecosystem, shaping not only content production and distribution, but also the processes through which information is legitimized in the public sphere (Oktarina et al., 2025).

Previous research has highlighted both the benefits and ethical challenges of artificial intelligence in media, particularly in relation to personalization, automation, and audience engagement (Filipović, 2024). Building on these insights, this paper shifts the focus from viewing AI as a technological tool to understanding it as a medium that structures communication processes and redistributes communicative power. This shift also requires a change in theoretical perspective.

Rather than treating artificial intelligence as a neutral technology that simply improves existing communication practices, this paper draws on media philosophy to understand AI as a structure that shapes the production of meaning. In this approach, media are not seen as passive channels, but as systems that influence how reality is perceived and interpreted (Schmidt, 2013). This perspective is further developed through pragmatic media philosophy, which focuses on how media function in practice – that is, how they are used, what effects they produce, and how they shape social behavior (Stepanov, 2013).

In contemporary media industries, generative AI is already widely used in journalism, advertising, and public relations, which makes it necessary to examine its broader social and ethical implications (Guzman & Lewis, 2024). At the same time, these systems are often presented as objective and neutral, which can obscure the fact that they are shaped by specific values, interests, and power relations (Todorović, 2011). This creates a gap between how AI is described and how it actually functions in communication.

A key issue in today's communication environment concerns uncertainty about the origin, intent, and authorship of content. Audiences increasingly find it difficult to distinguish between human-produced and AI-generated messages, as well as to determine who is responsible for their effects. This is especially visible in online and marketing environments, where personalization and audience targeting have become standard practices, while the processes behind them remain largely invisible (Gao et al., 2023).

At the core of these processes are algorithmic systems, particularly recommendation algorithms that select, rank, and deliver content based on user data, previous behavior, and predicted preferences. These systems determine which information users are more likely to see, thereby shaping attention, relevance, and visibility in communication. However, users often have limited insight into how these systems function, which raises important questions about transparency and control. Research shows that the acceptability of such practices depends on how users understand data use and the boundaries of targeting (Boerman et al., 2021).

This issue is closely connected to the concepts of algorithmic literacy and the algorithmic divide. Differences in users' understanding of how AI systems influence content selection may become a new form of communicative inequality, particularly in contexts such as information dissemination and political communication (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024). In addition, the emergence of synthetic media, including deepfakes and generative models, further complicates the situation by introducing uncertainty about the reliability of information and contributing to a decline in trust in media sources (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

This paper adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach based on conceptual analysis. It draws on interdisciplinary literature from media philosophy, platform studies, and empirical research in order to develop a framework for understanding artificial intelligence as a medium. Within this framework, ethical and discursive implications are examined as interconnected aspects of contemporary communication.

The main contribution of this paper lies in the conceptual reframing of artificial intelligence as a medium and communication infrastructure, as well as in connecting ethical and discursive perspectives within a pragmatic approach. By moving beyond instrumental views of technology, the analysis shows how AI reshapes meaning production, the distribution of visibility, and the boundaries of authorship and responsibility.

The aim of this paper is therefore to analyze artificial intelligence as a medium, with a focus on the ethical and discursive implications of algorithmic content production and mediation. In particular, it examines how AI transforms communicative practices, how it reshapes relations of power and responsibility, and how it affects transparency, truth, and trust in contemporary media environments. This also provides a basis for a broader discussion on responsible uses of artificial intelligence, in line with ethical frameworks that emphasize human autonomy, transparency, and accountability (UNESCO, 2021).

Artificial Intelligence as a Medium: Structural Foundations and Transformations of Communicative Practices

Understanding artificial intelligence as a medium requires a theoretical framework that moves beyond the instrumental view of technology as a neutral tool for information transmission. In contemporary media philosophy, media are understood as systems that determine what becomes visible, relevant, and socially significant, thereby shaping social practices and power relations (Schmidt, 2013). From this perspective, media do not merely reflect reality, but actively participate in its construction through processes of selection, encoding, and stabilization of meaning. Communication is therefore not conceived as a linear transmission of messages, but as a dynamic social practice in which media play a constitutive role in shaping what appears as social reality.

Pragmatic media philosophy further shifts the analytical focus toward the concrete social effects of media technologies. As Stepanov (2013) argues, the meaning

and value of media cannot be understood outside the practices of their use. Rather than offering abstract normative evaluations, this approach examines how media function in everyday communication, what patterns of behavior they encourage, and which forms of interaction they normalize. Within this framework, artificial intelligence can be understood not simply as a tool for processing information, but as a system that shapes how information is produced, organized, and interpreted in practice.

Insights from local media philosophy further illuminate this perspective. Todorović (2011) points out that new technologies are often presented through narratives of efficiency, progress, and neutrality, which can obscure their social and ethical implications. In the case of artificial intelligence, such narratives are reinforced through ideas of algorithmic objectivity and technological inevitability, despite empirical findings that AI systems reflect the values and assumptions of those who design and implement them (Gao et al., 2023).

Within this theoretical framework, it becomes possible to connect the analysis of artificial intelligence with ethical questions in a more concrete way. Instead of relying solely on abstract principles, ethical issues are examined through the practical consequences of AI use in communication, such as changes in user autonomy, the transparency of information sources, and the distribution of communicative power. This approach aligns with the understanding of media as spaces in which social values are shaped and contested (Stojanović Prelević, 2020), as well as with contemporary ethical frameworks emphasizing human rights, transparency, and accountability (UNESCO, 2021).

Building on these insights, artificial intelligence can also be understood as a communication infrastructure. This means that AI does not only process or transmit content, but actively organizes how communication flows. In practice, AI systems operate through mechanisms of selection, ranking, and prioritization, shaping which information becomes visible and how it is interpreted (Pierson et al., 2023).

This infrastructural role becomes particularly evident in platform-based communication environments, where the production and distribution of content take place within algorithmically structured systems that direct flows of attention and establish hierarchies of relevance. Recommendation algorithms—understood as systems that select and rank content based on user data and predicted preferences—play a central role in this process. They influence not only which topics become dominant, but also how users encounter and interpret information. As a result, AI systems increasingly assume functions traditionally associated with editorial decision-making (Pierson et al., 2023).

Insights from platform and infrastructure studies further deepen this understanding. Gillespie (2014) argues that algorithms function as largely invisible mechanisms that organize attention and shape what becomes socially significant in the public sphere. Similarly, Plantin et al. (2018) show that digital platforms act as communication infrastructures that not only enable communication, but also structure its conditions, determining what is technically, socially, and symbolically possible. From this perspective, artificial intelligence should not be understood only

as a medium of individual messages, but as part of a broader system that stabilizes patterns of interaction and meaning-making.

These structural changes are directly reflected in transformations of communicative practices. One of the most visible shifts concerns authorship. In AI-mediated environments, authorship can no longer be clearly attributed to a single human actor or institution. Instead, it emerges through interactions between users, algorithmic systems, and platforms, making it more difficult to determine intention, responsibility, and credibility in communication.

At the same time, artificial intelligence reshapes the ways in which communication exerts influence, particularly in contexts such as marketing and personalized communication. By analyzing user data and predicting behavior, AI systems adapt messages to individual preferences and habits. This form of influence does not rely on direct persuasion, but operates through the normalization of certain communicative patterns and expectations. As a result, persuasion becomes embedded in the structure of communication itself, rather than being limited to individual messages.

These transformations also reflect broader dynamics of platform-based communication, where algorithmic systems and economic logics interact to shape participation and the circulation of content (van Dijk, Poell & de Waal, 2018). In this context, AI not only mediates communication, but actively structures the conditions under which communication takes place, influencing visibility, relevance, and the distribution of attention.

Viewed in this way, artificial intelligence represents a foundational element of the contemporary communication environment. Taken together, these transformations suggest that AI does not simply mediate communication, but actively reconfigures the roles, expectations, and power relations that define how communication operates. This perspective shifts the analysis from what AI does to how it structures the conditions under which communication becomes possible, meaningful, and socially relevant.

Ethical Implications of AI-Mediated Communication: Power, Responsibility, and Surveillance

The growing use of artificial intelligence in the production and distribution of media content highlights the need for a systematic ethical analysis of its social consequences. As discussed earlier, AI systems do not function only as technical tools, but actively shape communication processes. For this reason, ethical issues cannot be understood solely at the level of individual responsibility. Instead, they need to be examined through the broader power relations embedded in algorithmic systems and communication infrastructures (Pierson et al., 2023). This perspective is reinforced by recent studies that identify AI as a structural factor in the transformation of media integrity, particularly through its role in reinforcing attention-driven communication and amplifying disinformation dynamics (Oktarina et al., 2025).

In contemporary media environments, power is less often exercised through direct control, such as censorship, and more through subtle forms of influence. One

key mechanism is algorithmic control of visibility and attention. Recommendation systems, which automatically select and rank content based on user data and predicted preferences, determine which topics and messages become more visible, while others remain marginal. In this way, they shape what is seen as relevant in the public sphere, often without users being aware of these processes (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024).

Research shows that this type of communication structure can lead to audience segmentation and a narrowing of the range of content users are exposed to. By directing attention toward certain types of content, algorithms help shape the overall structure of the communication environment (Pierson et al., 2023). From an ethical perspective, the issue is therefore not limited to individual misleading messages, but concerns how communication itself is organized and how this organization affects public debate. This also raises the question of responsibility.

In traditional media systems, responsibility for content could usually be attributed to a specific author or institution. In AI-mediated environments, however, responsibility is distributed across multiple actors, including developers, technology companies, platforms, and users. This makes it more difficult to determine who is accountable for the effects of communication, since outcomes result from the interaction of many different elements. Studies on AI governance show that this complexity complicates responses to issues such as disinformation, discrimination, and manipulation (Pierson et al., 2023).

International ethical frameworks attempt to address these challenges by emphasizing accountability, transparency, and human oversight. For example, the UNESCO Recommendation states that responsibility for AI systems cannot be assigned to the systems themselves, but must remain with the human actors and institutions involved in their development and use (UNESCO, 2021).

The question of responsibility is closely connected to the issue of surveillance. AI systems rely on large amounts of user data, which are collected and processed to enable personalization and content optimization. These practices often become part of everyday communication and are presented as necessary for improving user experience.

This process can be better understood through the concept of datafication, which refers to the transformation of social activities into data that can be tracked, analyzed, and used for decision-making. As Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue, datafication is not just a technical process, but a key feature of contemporary power relations. Within this system, users' behaviors and interactions are continuously monitored and translated into data, which then shapes future communication.

Empirical research shows that such forms of surveillance are often not perceived as problematic, mainly because they are gradual and not easily visible (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024). However, from an ethical perspective, this normalization has important consequences. It can affect user autonomy, limit privacy, and influence how people express themselves, as they adjust their behavior to the conditions of algorithmically structured environments.

These processes can also be interpreted through Foucault's concept of power as something that operates through internalized norms rather than direct coercion

(Foucault, 1997). In this sense, AI-mediated communication does not only shape external conditions, but also influences how individuals think, behave, and understand their role within communication systems.

Taken together, the ethical implications of AI-mediated communication emerge through the interaction of power, responsibility, and surveillance. This perspective shows that ethical questions are not separate from communication processes, but are built into their very structure. It also supports the view of artificial intelligence as a medium with deep and far-reaching social consequences. As such, ethical questions cannot be treated as external constraints on technology, but must be understood as integral to the design and functioning of AI-mediated communication systems.

Discursive Implications of AI-Mediated Communication: Transparency, Truth, and Trust

Understanding artificial intelligence as a medium also requires examining its discursive implications, especially in relation to transparency, the concept of truth, and audience trust in media content. In contemporary communication environments, where AI systems take part in producing, selecting, and distributing information, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify sources, authorship, and intent. This change affects not only individual messages, but also the broader stability of the public sphere – the conditions under which knowledge is produced, evaluated, and accepted (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

In this context, transparency is widely recognized as a key principle for maintaining trust in communication systems. In practice, this involves informing users when content is generated or selected by algorithms, making the basic logic of recommendation systems understandable, and clearly indicating responsibility for content (Gao et al., 2023). Recent empirical research further shows that transparency does not function only as a means of providing information, but also as a communicative signal that can reduce uncertainty and foster trust, even among users who are initially skeptical toward AI (Park & Yoon, 2025).

Conversely, when such transparency is lacking, users may become confused and less likely to trust media content. Studies on AI-generated news indicate that audiences expect clear signals about algorithmic involvement, and that the presence or absence of such signals directly influences how they assess credibility and reliability (Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). This suggests that transparency is not only a technical or regulatory issue, but a central element in how communication is interpreted and evaluated.

At the same time, transparency is closely connected to changes in the concept of truth. Generative AI systems can produce content that appears coherent and convincing, but is not necessarily based on verifiable facts. This creates a new kind of challenge, as users increasingly find it difficult to distinguish between reliable information and artificially generated content (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

Importantly, research shows that synthetic media do not always mislead users directly. Instead, they often create a more general sense of uncertainty about what

can be trusted. As a result, the problem of truth is no longer limited to whether individual claims are accurate, but extends to how people decide what counts as credible information. This uncertainty directly affects trust.

In today's media environment, trust is often formed under conditions in which users do not fully understand how content is produced and distributed. In this context, transparency plays a key role, as it not only improves understanding, but also functions as a signal of accountability that shapes how users interpret the reliability of AI-mediated communication (Park & Yoon, 2025). At the same time, studies on algorithmic literacy show that users who better understand the role of AI are more capable of critically evaluating media content (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024).

However, these individual capacities are shaped by broader structural conditions. AI-driven media environments influence not only what information becomes visible, but also how it is perceived and evaluated, thereby contributing to wider challenges of media integrity and trust (Oktarina et al., 2025). This interplay between user understanding, transparency, and algorithmic structuring suggests that trust in AI-mediated communication is not solely an individual cognitive outcome, but a relational effect shaped by both user capacities and the underlying architecture of communication systems.

In such conditions, trust may take two problematic forms. On the one hand, users may accept content uncritically, assuming it is objective or neutral. On the other hand, they may develop a general distrust toward the media as a whole. In both cases, trust becomes unstable because it is not based on a clear understanding of how communication systems work.

As discussed in earlier sections, these issues are especially visible in marketing. Personalized communication often relies on automated targeting, where persuasive strategies are embedded in algorithmic processes. Research shows that when users become aware of such targeting, it can negatively affect their attitudes toward advertising, particularly if they feel their privacy is threatened or that they are being manipulated (Boerman et al., 2021). This indicates that trust depends not only on the message itself, but also on how fair and transparent the communication process appears to be.

Taken together, transparency, truth, and trust can be understood as closely connected dimensions of contemporary communication. Their analysis requires attention to both technological systems and social contexts. From this perspective, the discursive implications of artificial intelligence cannot be separated from its ethical and structural effects. Instead, they form part of a broader transformation of the media environment, which sets the stage for the concluding discussion of this paper.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the role of artificial intelligence in contemporary communication cannot be adequately understood if it is reduced to a technological tool or a neutral instrument of automation. By applying insights from media

philosophy and a pragmatic approach, artificial intelligence has been conceptualized as a medium and communication infrastructure that actively shapes how meaning is produced, how visibility is distributed, and how power operates within digital environments.

The analysis has shown that AI transforms key dimensions of communicative practices. First, it reconfigures authorship by distributing it across complex interactions between users, systems, and platforms, thereby complicating traditional notions of responsibility. Second, it reshapes persuasion, particularly in the context of personalized communication, where influence operates through algorithmic selection and the normalization of communicative patterns rather than through direct intervention.

Furthermore, the paper has demonstrated that the ethical implications of AI-mediated communication emerge from the interaction of power, responsibility, and surveillance. Rather than being limited to individual cases of misuse, these issues are embedded in the structural organization of communication systems, where algorithmic processes shape visibility, collect and process user data, and influence behavior in often non-transparent ways.

At the same time, the discursive implications of artificial intelligence were examined through the concepts of transparency, truth, and trust. The analysis has shown that AI systems not only affect the content of communication, but also the conditions under which information is interpreted and evaluated. In particular, the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between human and AI-generated content contributes to uncertainty and challenges the stability of trust in media systems.

The main contribution of this paper lies in integrating ethical and discursive perspectives within a conceptual framework that understands artificial intelligence as a medium. This approach makes it possible to move beyond fragmented analyses of individual problems and to examine AI as a structural component of contemporary communication environments. This contribution is particularly reflected in linking pragmatic media philosophy with contemporary empirical insights on AI, thereby offering an integrated framework for analyzing both structural and discursive dimensions of AI-mediated communication.

These findings also suggest that existing regulatory and technical responses, while necessary, are not sufficient on their own. A more comprehensive approach requires continuous critical reflection on the role of AI in shaping communication practices, as well as the development of greater algorithmic literacy among users.

Future research could build on this framework by empirically examining specific applications of AI in journalism, marketing, and political communication, as well as by exploring models of transparency and accountability that can strengthen user trust. In this way, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how artificial intelligence transforms communication and highlights the importance of integrating ethical considerations into both theoretical and practical analyses of media systems. Ultimately, understanding artificial intelligence as a medium means recognizing that the future of communication will not be shaped solely by what technologies can do, but by how they organize meaning, structure visibility, and redefine the conditions under which trust, knowledge, and social relations are formed.

References

- Beer, D. (2017). The social power of algorithms. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1216147>
- Boerman, S. C., Kruikemeier, S., & Bol, N. (2021). When is personalized advertising crossing personal boundaries? How type of information, data sharing, and personalized pricing influence consumer perceptions of personalized advertising. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 4, 100144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100144>
- Couldry, N., & Mejias, U. A. (2019). Data colonialism: Rethinking big data's relation to the contemporary subject. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 36(6), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476418796632>
- Eder, M., & Sjøvaag, H. (2024). Artificial intelligence and the dawn of an algorithmic divide. *Frontiers in Communication*, 9, Article 1453251. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1453251>
- Foucault, M. (1997). *Discipline and punish* [Nadzirati i kažnjavati]. Beograd: Prosveta.
- Gao, B., Wang, Y., Xie, H., Hu, Y., & Hu, Y. (2023). Artificial intelligence in advertising: Advancements, challenges, and ethical considerations in targeting, personalization, content creation, and ad optimization. *SAGE Open*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231210759>
- Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. Boczkowski, & K. Foot (Eds.), *Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society* (pp. 167–194). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262525374.003.0009>
- Guzman, A. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2024). What generative AI means for the media industries, and why it matters to study the collective consequences for advertising, journalism, and public relations. *Emerging Media*, 2, 347–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543241289239>
- Heidegger, M. (1999). *The question concerning technology* [Pitanje o tehnici]. In Predavanja i rasprave. Beograd: Plato.
- OECD. (2019). *OECD principles on artificial intelligence*. OECD Publishing. <https://oecd.ai/en/ai-principles>
- Oktarina, R. A., Marwanto, R. G., Wulandari, E. R., & Prima, E. P. (2025). Artificial intelligence and media integrity in digital media: A literature review on algorithmic disinformation and communication ethics. *Jurnal Spektrum Komunikasi*, 13(4), 585–595. <https://doi.org/10.37826/spektrum.v13i4.1209>
- Park, K., & Yoon, H. Y. (2025). AI algorithm transparency, pipelines for trust not prisms: Mitigating general negative attitudes and enhancing trust toward AI. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12, Article 1160. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05116-z>
- Pierson, J., Kerr, A., Robinson, S. C., Fanni, R., Steinkogler, V. E., Milan, S., & Zampedri, G. (2023). Governing artificial intelligence in the media and communications sector. *Internet Policy Review*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2023.1.1683>
- Plantin, J.-C., Lagoze, C., Edwards, P. N., & Sandvig, C. (2018). Infrastructure studies meet platform studies in the age of Google and Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 20(1), 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816661553>

- Schmidt, S. (2008). Media Philosophy— A Reasonable Programme?. In H. Hrachovec & A. Pichler (Ed.), *Philosophy of the Information Society: Proceedings of the 30th International Ludwig Wittgenstein-Symposium in Kirchberg, 2007* (pp. 89-106). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110328486.89>
- Stepanov, M. (2013). What is pragmatic media philosophy? *Pragmatism Today*, 4(1), 85–93.
- Stojanović Prelević, I. (2020). *Filozofija medija: pragmatički i aksiološki aspekti* [Media philosophy: Pragmatic and axiological aspects]. Niš: Filozofski fakultet.
- Todorović, L. (2011). *Diskurs novih tehnologija* [The discourse of new technologies]. Beograd: Clio.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380455>
- Vaccari, C., & Chadwick, A. (2020). Deepfakes and disinformation: Exploring the impact of synthetic political video on deception, uncertainty, and trust in news. *Social Media + Society*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120903408>
- van Dijk, J., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). The platform society: Public values in a connective world. *Communication and the Public*, 3(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.23860/MGDR-2018-03-03-08>
- Voorveld, H. A. M., Meppelink, C. S., & Boerman, S. C. (2024). Consumers' persuasion knowledge of algorithms in social media advertising: identifying consumer groups based on awareness, appropriateness, and coping ability. *International Journal of Advertising*, 43(6), 960–986. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2023.2264045>
- Zier, J., & Diakopoulos, N. (2024). Labeling AI-generated news content: Matching journalist intentions with audience expectations. In *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW)*.

Veštačka inteligencija kao medijum: etičke i diskurzivne implikacije

Irina Filipović, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad analizira veštačku inteligenciju kao medij iz perspektive pragmatičke filozofije medija, sa fokusom na njene etičke i diskurzivne implikacije u savremenim komunikacionim procesima. Polazeći od kritike instrumentalnog shvatanja tehnologije, rad konceptualizuje veštačku inteligenciju kao komunikacionu infrastrukturu koja aktivno učestvuje u oblikovanju značenja, distribuciji vidljivosti i preraspodeli moći u medijskom okruženju.

Istraživanje se zasniva na kvalitativnom i interpretativnom pristupu, odnosno konceptualnoj analizi relevantne literature iz oblasti filozofije medija, studija platformi i empirijskih istraživanja o veštačkoj inteligenciji u komunikaciji. U tom okviru ispituju se transformacije komunikacionih praksi, naročito u pogledu autorstva, odgovornosti i persuzije, kao i ključne etičke dimenzije poput moći, nadzora i transparentnosti.

Posebna pažnja posvećena je diskurzivnim implikacijama veštačke inteligencije, koje se razmatraju kroz međusobno povezane pojmove transparentnosti, istine i poverenja. Analiza pokazuje da generativni i algoritamski sistemi ne utiču samo na sadržaj komunikacije, već i na načine na koje se procenjuje verodostojnost informacija i formira poverenje publike.

Rezultati ukazuju na to da se etički i diskurzivni izazovi ne mogu svesti na pojedinačne zloupotrebe ili tehničke nedostatke, već predstavljaju strukturne efekte algoritamski posredovanih komunikacionih sistema. Rad zaključuje da razumevanje veštačke inteligencije kao medija omogućava dublju analizu savremenih komunikacionih procesa i naglašava potrebu za integracijom etičke refleksije u svakodnevne komunikacione prakse, uz poseban akcenat na transparentnost, odgovornost i zaštitu autonomije korisnika.

Ključne reči: veštačka inteligencija, etika, filozofija medija, algoritamsko upravljanje, digitalni marketing

Received: 15th March 2026

Revision received: 27th April 2026

Accepted: 27th April 2026

APPLIED MEDIA STUDIES JOURNAL

VII/1 (2026)

Publisher

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ

For the Publisher

Vladimir Ž. Jovanović, PhD, Dean

Publishing Unit Coordinator

Mihailo Antović, PhD, Vice-Dean for Science and Research

Proofreading

Marija Stojković

Technical Editorial Office

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

Format

17 x 24 cm

Press

TRI O, Aranđelovac

Print run

10

Niš, 2026

ISSN 3042-3600

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

316.774

APPLIED Media Studies Journal /
editor-in-chief Neven Obradović. - Vol. 6, no. 1
(2025)- . - Niš : Faculty of Philosophy, University
of Niš, 2025- (Arandjelovac : Tri O). - 24 cm

Polugodišnje. - Je nastavak:
Media studies and applied ethics = ISSN 2683-5355
ISSN 3042-3600 = Applied Media Studies Journal

COBISS.SR-ID 169249033