

Online media and broadcasting ethics

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Abstract

Background: The code of ethics, drafted by a group of local and foreign experts, aimed to establish a certain framework where a distinction was made between what should and should not be broadcast in the media. For many years this code of ethics was respected by most of the traditional media in the country, where quality content and ethics had the main weight during the broadcast.

Purpose: This study tries to analyze one of the most common problems in the Albanian media, the transmission of unethical content. The study relies on quantitative and qualitative data, researching both the nature of the content being broadcast and the causes leading to its transmission. Method: In the framework of this study, monitoring was conducted in various online media, and also a survey was conducted with 22 surveyors, to understand if the public needs these contents and what access they have to them.

Keywords: *Media, online media, ethics, broadcasting, content, interests*

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Introduction

LaRue T. Hosmer defined ethics as “a statement of an organization’s norms and beliefs, an attempt to establish the firm’s moral standards.” Although ethics has had different approaches over the years, it made the distinction between what should and what should not, between wrong and right. One of the most important ethical theories was that of Immanuel Kant, deontology, which believed in the philosophy that ethics follows universal moral laws such as do not lie, do not deceive. In the media framework, this philosophical approach was related to the respect of the basic principles to get closer to the right and the truth, starting from impartial, free, and objective reporting and information. (T.Hosmer, 1991)

In the 2000s, the first contact of television with technological developments and their use began. Of course, this evolution marked an explosion, culminating in 2004, when Digitalb started broadcasting despite obstacles and vicissitudes. Over the years, using technology and going online was seen as a necessity and means of survival for these televisions. With each passing year, the television stations increased their technology-oriented funding while the newspaper became less and less useful every day. The well-known theory of “convergence” happened exactly when all the media created their online pages, as an opportunity to expand the channels of information distribution.

Top-Channel, according to the observations made during the study, turns out to have a massive activity and following in all its social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, etc. Innovation media tried to be multi-platform and always available in the hands of the reader and with information as quickly as possible. Here we can take the case of Top Channel, which, in addition to broadcasting on television, publishes its content on several online platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc.

The code of ethics and traditional media, mainly television, interacted as an unbreakable “law” that ensured the smooth running of all content and broadcasting. The introduction of new means of communication and the transition of the media to the online world also brought the beginning of the first ethical problems. During this transition, we encountered a confrontation of different cultures, where the traditional one was oriented towards verification, impartiality, and accuracy, while the online one demanded immediacy and “fast-food” products.

The rapid technological development made television no longer a medium where people gathered to watch or be informed but to move into an online and ubiquitous individual act. This was tempting for the reader but challenging for television and new media. At the time when television was the main medium, it

was the reader who sought it, while in the digital age this approach has changed, it is the media that follows and seeks the reader.

This type of evolution increased its consumption and immediacy of use. A reader can read the same news in different versions and different media at the same time and within a few minutes. This increases, even more, the pressure on the media to be “latest”, which leads to the creation of various problems. Here it is worth mentioning “Agenda Setting” and “Agenda Building”. So, the media is no longer a mechanism for setting the agenda but mainly builds them. This change was noticed in online media and not in television, where “Agenda Setting” has more value.

Methodology

Based on the type of topic and the increased appetite for views which translates into financial income, the research itself requires measurement through different indicators. For this reason, it was thought to do a qualitative as well as quantitative analysis.

The qualitative analysis is mainly based on the evaluation of different media contents through observation, as well as on a large number of researchers who have addressed this topic by local and foreign authors.

The quantitative analysis relies mainly on primary data collected from and monitoring various online media. The questionnaire was completed during the period 20-28 April 2022, shared online, and prepared in google form.

Based on a wide range of studies by local and foreign authors who explain the approach on which online media relies, in the specific case of the Albanian media, it turns out that the online media industry has shown a tendency to provide content that breaks ethical rules but that attracts visitors.

Thus, the *hypothesis* we raise in this study is:

The transition of traditional media online escalated the ethics of broadcasting.

Research questions:

1- Why does the media decide to break the ethical code and how has this approach been transformed?

2- Is the reader interested in unethical content that is broadcast by the media?

Results

Many researchers have tried to create a reflection on the relationship between ethics and law in themselves. In the 18th century, scholars of liberalism tried to define a boundary between ethics and law. Immanuel Kant says that “Ethics

considers internal human attributes, but rights are related to external practical behavior”. Based on this, researchers Sedigheh Babran, and Mahboubeh Ataherian concluded that “ethics and rights are not equal concepts; ethics values rights”. (Sedigheh Babran, 2019)

Kant’s principles were otherwise known as the theory of deontology. Ethics, according to this theory, uses rules to distinguish right from wrong. Kant believes that “ethical actions follow moral laws, such as don’t lie, don’t steal and don’t cheat, and in the case of the media, they translate into respecting the basic professional principles to get as close as possible to the right and the truth as a goal of an honest, true reporting and information, without infringing anyone’s freedom and rights”. (Çipuri, Media përballë pasqyrës, 2021)

The new broadcast approach to online media

Technology and broadcasting the latest news so that the audience is engaged is no longer seen as the exception but as the norm, which essentially has instant information. According to the researchers, we must admit that going online has forever changed the structure of news and the way it is transmitted. This kind of evolution takes the individual further and further away from television because the news that may be broadcast on the central news on television can be read many hours before. (McFadden, 2016)

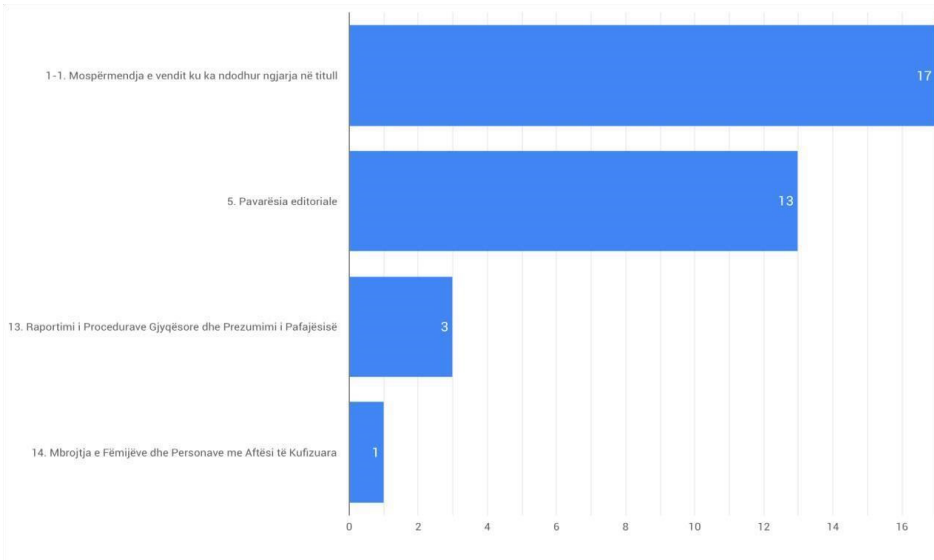
Ramadan Çipuri, in his book “Vetëcensura”, says that the traditional media was forced to “convert” to new technological tools, as the only way to increase the diversity of information distribution channels. Media adaptation and diversification was seen as necessary element and survival tool to compete with the rest of the online market. Çipuri points out the fact that the media is still in the process of adopting new practices, which aim to reach as wide as possible. (Çipuri, Vetëcensura, realitete të gazetarisë shqiptare, 2016)

Jeffrey Cole asserts that “the era of single newsroom media with predictable deadlines is gone.” Cole parallels the importance of the online age with newspapers, where according to him, “newspapers have become breaking news businesses”. This is because online they can do instant coverage by writing and posting their stories with audiovisual content at the last minute. (McFadden, 2016)

In a monitoring report published by the Albanian Media Council, the ethical codes that are violated the most by the media are highlighted. The monitoring carried out from the period December 2019-March 2020 highlights a significant problem both in editorial independence and in the difference between fact and opinion. 2 are the main elements that must expose the problem of editorial independence such as “politics or power ready writings and secret advertisements”. According to the reports, not distinguishing fact from opinion, “indicates an

attempt that the reporting is not impartial but “enriched” with the opinion of the one who reports by manipulating the reader”. (Këshilli Shqiptar i Medias, 2020)

FIGURE 1: The ethical codes that are violated most by online television portals



The audience creates “conditions” in front of the media, encouraging the “break” of ethics

With the evolution of the media and its extension online, researchers noticed that the audience also began to create a certain position. Consumers of media articles are increasingly changing the way they access information obtained online. Joseph B. McFadden notes that the consumer is not bound to receive information when the media wants it, but when he wants it himself. But not only that, “they want to get news when they want and when they can collect it from a variety of sources”. (McFadden, 2016)

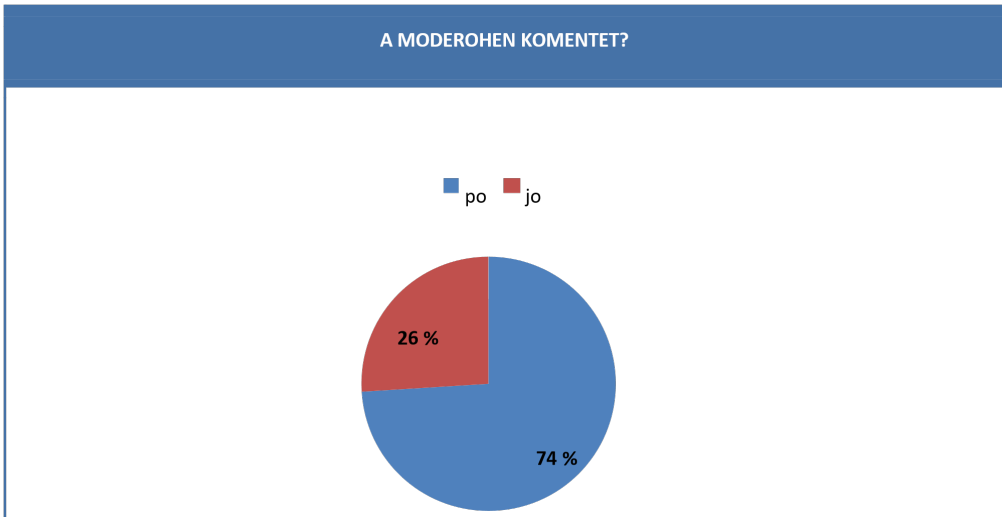
With this added luxury in the hands of the audience, not only the pressure on the media begins but also the lameness in its transmission. The consumer is no longer just a reader on social networks, he reacts and gives opinions through comments. This type of interaction usually consists of the use of insults and insults “toward minorities, religious communities, groups, starting from sexual orientation, specific public figures, and politicians, etc.” According to a survey conducted by the Albanian Media Institute, “for the most part, online media have enabled comments from users: in 80% of them”. What makes this type of interactivity more interesting is the assertion of online media leaders, who state that “there are users who are more interested in reading comments than the content of the article itself”.

FIGURE 2: “Can readers comment?”. Source: Albanian Media Institute



Where online media executives were asked, “if they moderate comments and most said they do: 26% of them said they don’t moderate them, while 74% said they filter them.” (Medias, 2018) (Eun-Ju Lee, 2017)

FIGURE 3: “Moderation of comments”. Source: Albanian Media Institute



According to McFadden, with this positioning, the media consumer causes the media to lose revenue by cutting advertising. “The money is not enough to compensate for lost readers and print ads,” McFadden says, adding that with less revenue, the support base for quality news is shrinking. The pressure and reduction of budgets for the media mean that there is less attention to the information that

is created and more attention to its distribution. The Center for Excellence in Journalism (State of Media) has called the news industry today “more reactive than proactive.” (McFadden, 2016)

Relationship quality / profit

Journalist Patricia Sullivan says that “Right now, almost no online news site invests in original, in-depth, and scrupulously edited reporting.” On the other hand, McFadden points out that this type of operation causes superficial news to be distributed, commented on, and reviewed, but they do not go deeper to discover new facts and elements. (McFadden, 2016)

Turkish researchers Ali Murat Kırık and Ahmet Çetinkaya affirm the same, who says that “online journalists often reuse the news they receive from news agencies in a form that fulfills their goals.” (Ali Murat Kırık, 2017)

Investment media and readers’ demand for real-time material is growing every day. According to the researchers, the media is aware that what is most demanded of them in these moments is the speed in transmission. On the other hand, this brings various ethical problems which are far from “being a journalist”. (McFadden, 2016)

The media, mainly inclined to products produced at less cost and immediately, decides to broadcast ready-made and shallow statements from certain institutions or individuals. So, it is about information quoted directly from politicians’ profiles, mainly on social networks such as Facebook or Twitter. Of course, there are also quotes copied from certain sites or institutions. (Medias, 2018)

The UNESCO report notes that the media pay more attention to the clicks received by an article than to “minutes devoted” and “time spent” on these pages (which are also more significant long-term indicators of quality journalism) that are used to justify increasing digital advertising rates in an increasingly poor market”. But operating towards such an element, according to the report, is likely to lead to an irreparable loss of public trust in the media. (UNESCO, 2020)

“Click Journalism”

According to the researchers, the difficult financial situation and the integration into social networks made the media tend towards the so-called “click journalism”. Following this practice became mandatory for the media, which by increasing the number of clicks, also increase the profit from various advertisements. This is done not only for digital advertising but also for other methods of their application. To achieve this type of approach, the media use intriguing news, with headlines and images that tease the reader to click on them, even though

the content may be different. This type of “informative mess and unethical news negatively affects the journalism profession”. (Ali Murat Kırık, 2017)

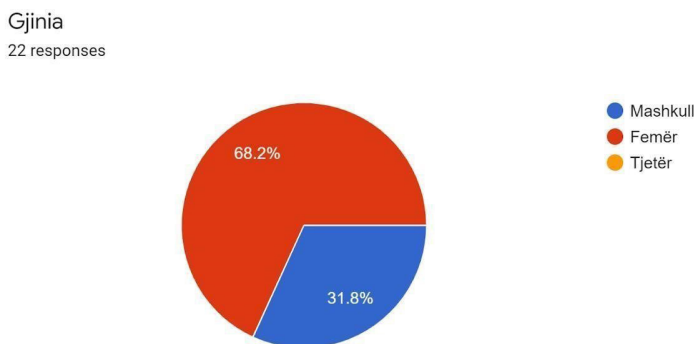
According to an observation by the Albanian Media Institute, online media include phrases like “you’ll never believe what...” or “unbelievable what happened to...”, often deliberately leaving out the title of unfinished, which prompts readers to click and read.” This body notes that another element that attracts clicks is the use of nude photos and articles related to sex. Horoscopes or “impossible things” are also other elements that the online media uses as “bait” for the consumer. (Medias, 2018)

The report of the United Nations Organization for 2020, states that this practice also includes “misleading use of statements, illustrations or statistics, true materials taken out of context, misleading materials (when the name of a journalist or the logo of a newsroom is used by other persons without any relation to them), as well as manipulated and fabricated content”. “Click journalism” is most evident in the absorption of “click bait” clicks, where editors use headlines that attract more and more. (UNESCO, 2020)

Discussions

As part of this study, a survey was conducted with different citizens, to understand their perception of the violation of broadcasting ethics and their approach to these violations. The questionnaire was completed during the period 20-28 April 2022, shared online, and prepared in google form.

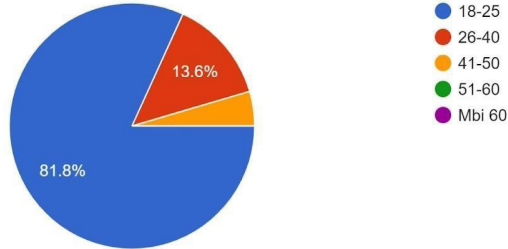
FIGURE 4: Gender



Meanwhile, the figure below presents the data on the age of the respondents.

FIGURE 5: Age

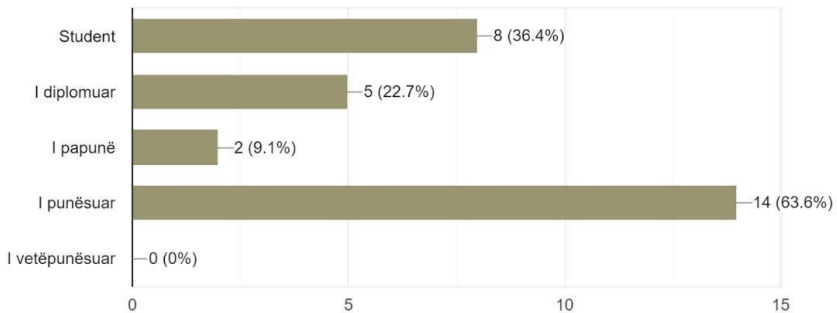
Mosha
22 responses



We also asked respondents about their status, to have a clearer reflection of their engagement and level of media and information culture.

TABLE 1: Status

Statusi
22 responses

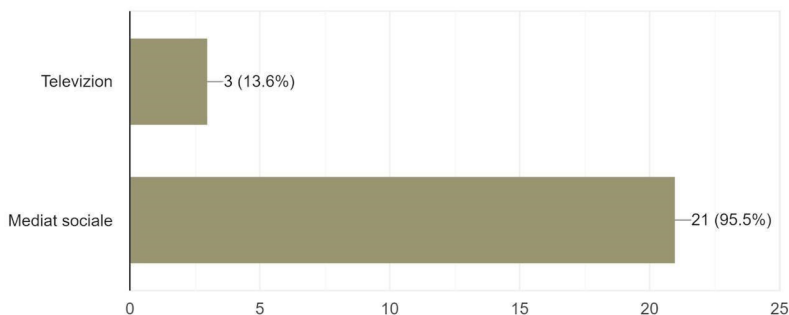


From the responses of the respondents, we noticed that social media play an important role in informing the public, while television is almost dying out when it comes to being informed. 21 of the people surveyed choose social media to get informed, against 3 other people who also use television or both.

TABLE 2: On which platforms are you informed about events?

Në cilat platforma informoheni për ngjarjet?

22 responses



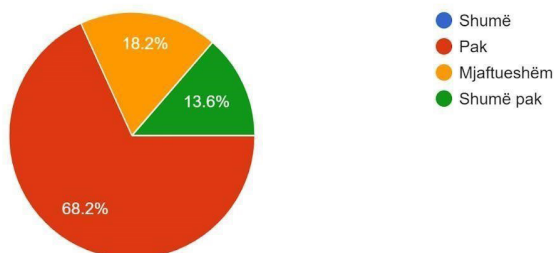
Although citizens choose online media to be informed, they remain pessimistic about the information that these media transmit. To the question “How much trust do you have in the information transmitted by the Albanian media online”, 68.2% of respondents have little trust, 13.6% very little, and only

18.2% have enough confidence in the information they receive. This result highlights a very important element that is changing with social media, the public has lost trust in the media even though the information may be in real-time.

FIGURE 6: How much trust do you have in the information transmitted by the Albanian online media?

Sa besim keni në informacionin që transmeton media shqiptare online?

22 responses



When asked about the statement “Give your assessment about the statement: The information I get from Albanian online media helps me to be more informed”, about 54 percent of them agreed with this. According to logical reasoning, these

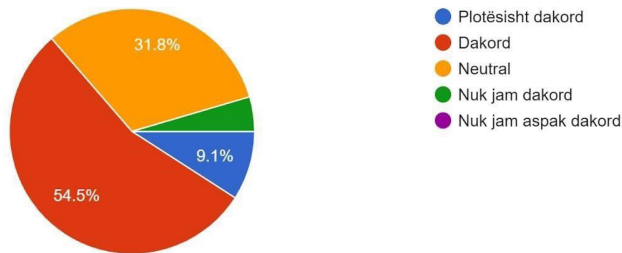
answers are also related to the many sources of information, which help them to understand what is happening in the reality that surrounds them. But an overwhelming part of them, about 32 percent, were neutral to this statement.

FIGURE 7: Give your assessment about the statement:

The information I get from Albanian media online helps me to be more informed

Jepni vlerësimin tuaj rreth pohimit: Informacioni që marr nga media shqiptare online më ndihmon të jem më i informuar

22 responses

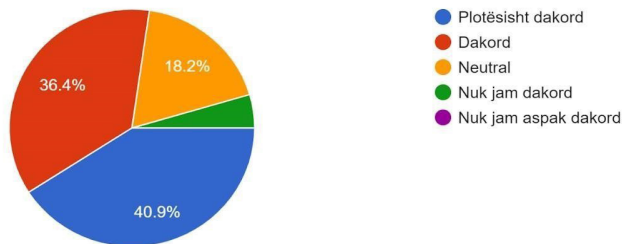


In the eyes of the public, Albanian online media pays more attention to its financial interests than to inform the public. 40.9 percent of the respondents state that they completely agree with the statement “Give your assessment about the statement: Albanian media pays more attention to its financial interests than quality information of the public.”, and about 36 percent agree. 18.2 percent of them are neutral while a very small percentage disagree.

FIGURE 8: Give your assessment of the statement: The Albanian media pays more attention to its financial interests than to the quality information of the public

Jepni vlerësimin tuaj rreth pohimit: Media shqiptare i kushton më shumë rëndësi interesave të veta financiare se sa informimit cilësor të publikut.

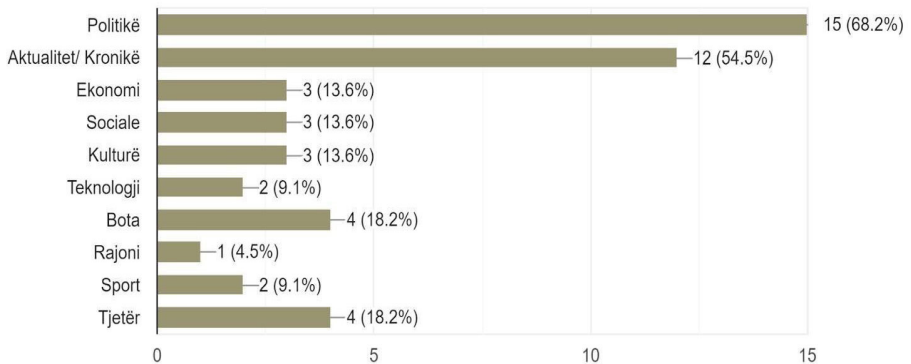
22 responses



Politics continues to be the main source of news circulating in the media, occupying relatively a large space compared to other content. About 68 percent of respondents encounter more political news in Albanian online media. Also, the news of the chronicle is ranked second after the political news. 54.5 percent of respondents encounter more chronic news in online media than other content such as economy, social, culture, etc.

TABLE 3: What are the news/contents you encounter most in the Albanian online media?

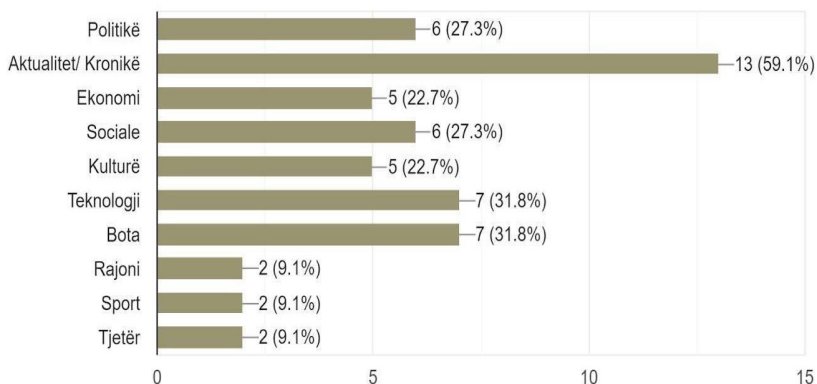
22 responses



Regarding the statement “What news do you follow most in the Albanian media online?”, 59.1 percent of the respondents follow news related to the chronicle and current affairs. In second place are news from the world and the region with respectively 31.8 percent and in third place is political news with 27.3 percent.

TABLE 4: What are the news you follow the most in the Albanian online media?

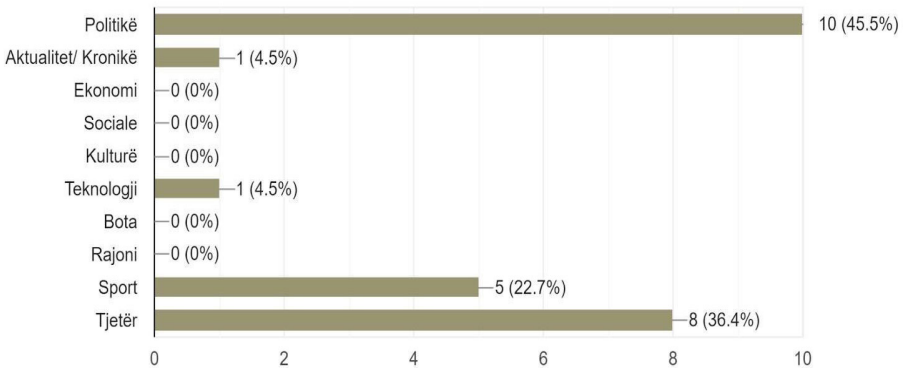
22 responses



The political news that citizens do not want to follow in online media accounts for about 45 percent of the respondents. While other news that has nothing to do with the economy, culture, society, etc., are the things that citizens want to see but that the media does not give the proper importance to. From the result, we notice that even though politics occupies the largest space in online media, the public is oversaturated and little interested in what happens.

TABLE 5: What are the news you follow the most in the Albanian online media?

22 responses

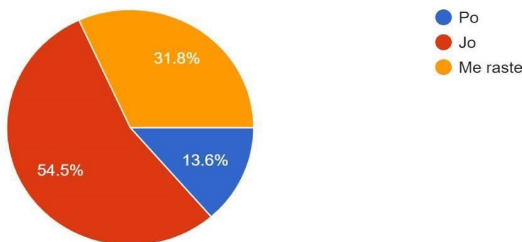


Regarding the question “Most of the Albanian online media broadcast unethical materials such as Bias, pictures of people killed, injured, in accidents, children’s faces, unpleasant words, information that is not in the interest of public opinion, etc. Are you, as a reader, interested in watching these broadcasts?”, about 55 percent of the respondents say that they are not interested in these details or ethical violations of the media, which can be of different natures.

On the other hand, about 32 percent of them have cases where you are interested in this information, while 13.6 percent say that this information interests you.

FIGURE 9: Most of the Albanian online media broadcast unethical materials such as Bias, images of people killed or injured, in accidents, children’s faces, unpleasant words, information that is not in the interest of public opinion, etc...

22 responses

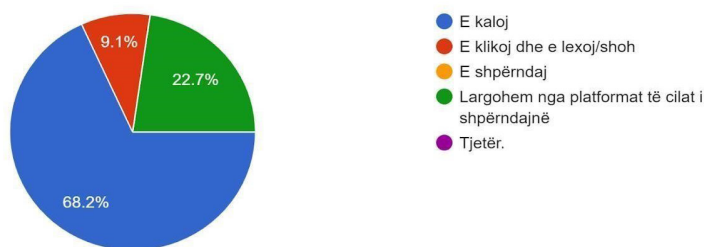


When we asked the respondents “Which are the Albanian online media that commit the most ethical violations according to you?”, they ranked many media starting from “Life is fun” which is mentioned the most, Syri, Top Channel, Balkan Web, anonymous portals, pro-government media as well as pink media. If we look carefully at the approach of these media, we see that they are positioned in certain political directions, whereby attacking each other, they ignore the codes and ethical rules of broadcasting.

When respondents were asked “How did they react when they come across such unethical content?”, about 68 percent of them passed it off as news or information. But about 23 percent of them boycotted these media that spread unethical information, leaving their platforms. And only 9.1 percent of respondents stopped reading and watching unethical content.

FIGURE 10: How do you react when you encounter such unethical content?

22 responses



What we noticed from the survey is that the public is aware of the ethical violations that online media commits. Having greater access to information, the public has chosen to select the media where they receive information. As noted in the survey, the majority of the public decides to boycott online platforms that distribute unethical content that is not in the public interest.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis where local and foreign researchers analyze in detail the new media approach and its content, combined with the empirical data collected within this study through the questionnaire and continuous observations of online media, we conclude that Albanian online media offers the public material with ethical violations and unnecessary content.

In response to the raised hypothesis, we can say that the online transition of traditional media has taken off the “rails” in terms of ethical rules and the established approach. In online media, we observe a speed-reach-profit ratio, which brings nothing but a deception of the audience and support of their financial interests.

As the questionnaire highlighted, the media is oriented to overfill its space with political news due to low-cost production, turning this phenomenon to the detriment of information and ethical codes. The media must maintain a balance between the categories it covers by imitating impartiality, accuracy, and objectivity.

On the other hand, citizens find that they are mostly aware of the breaking of ethical codes by the media. And what constituted a negative element for the media and a positive one for the audience, was that the latter has begun to choose and select the media where it receives information. Despite this, the public's trust in online media has suffered a significant decline, turning this into an important concern.

Further suggestions

The wide reach of social networks and the engagement of the media in them, responding with immediacy and diversity, requires specific ethical codes that guarantee the smooth running of this process. Although there have been ongoing efforts to draft a code of ethics, these efforts have been minimalist as the media itself is not interested. Looking at the research results, we can easily say that the media has found the right “bait” to capture the audience, and this cannot be done without “breaking the rules”.

The process of self-regulation is a failed attempt from the start, given the media's approach to the public. Even the creation of a legal framework could regulate this highlighted problem, but on the other hand, the fear of possible censorship by the institutions and other actors involved increases.

Standing between two “fires”, self-regulation and the law, the media has not yet shown a full will to change certain broadcasting policies. From time to time there has been an upsurge of concern at the national level, but this only changed small media or institutional actors.

The AMA, the media authority, operates with a double standard where it controls and sets certain codes for traditional media but not for online media. So media operates in two areas, on the one hand, there are ethical frameworks while on the other hand, the consumer finds it online.

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Annex

Hello! This questionnaire is being carried out by Xhesjon Zogu, as part of research for academic reasons. The research analyzes in itself the new approach of traditional media during its online upheaval as well as the breaking of ethical rules during broadcasting. This study aims to recognize one of the most common problems in Albanian online media, the transmission of unethical content, as well as the perception of the audience. Name and surname *

Age *

18-25

26-40

41-50

51-60

Over 60

Status *

Student

Graduate

Unemployed

Employed

Self-employed

Other:

On which platforms are you informed about events? *

Television

Social media

How much trust do you have in the information transmitted by the Albanian online media? *

many

slightly

FAIRLY

Very little

Give your assessment about the statement: The information I get from the Albanian media online helps me to be more informed *

Agree

Agreed

Neutral

I disagree

I do not agree at all

Give your assessment of the statement: The Albanian media pays more attention to its financial interests than to the quality information of the public. *

Agree

Agreed

Neutral

I disagree

I do not agree at all

What are the news/contents you come across the most in Albanian online media? *

You can select more than one category

policy

Actuality/ Chronicle

economy

Social

Culture

Technology

world

region

SPORTS

Other

What is the news that you follow the most in Albanian online media? *

You can select more than one category

policy

Actuality/ Chronicle

economy

Social

Culture

Technology

world

region

SPORTS

Other

What is the news that you would NOT like to follow in the Albanian online media? *

You can select more than one category

policy

Actuality/ Chronicle

economy

Social

Culture

Technology

world

region

SPORTS

Other

Most of the Albanian online media broadcast unethical materials such as Images of people killed, or injured, in accidents, children's faces, unpleasant words, information that is not in the interest of public opinion, etc. Are you interested as a reader in watching these broadcasts? *

yes

not

Occasionally

How do you react when you come across such unethical content? *

I pass

I click it and read/watch it

I share it

I leave platforms that distribute Other.

View publication stats.