

## Relations between Traditional and Online Media in Albania

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### ABSTRACT

*Creating of new websites for news in Albania is dated in 1999 – 2000. The opening of ISP (Internet Service Provider) as Ada or Abissnet in 1998 made that internet service to come in media market, therefore it happened a rise to number of users of internet and the rise of interest for the information of web. The first media actors with attention to internet were the traditional media for obtaining from advantages and services of web, and for creating their window online. The first media were “Gazeta Shqiptare”, “Shekulli”, “Koha Jonë” and “Korrieri” for opening their web pages to internet in 1999. Actually there are present to internet 22 national daily newspapers, and also from day to day are enlarging and adding the individual initiatives to online information. Mostly of websites to Albanian media have applied a lot of techniques and interactive solutions, for their attempts in following and profit from the technology of web. They offer “share” option for sharing their information between social pages as “Facebook” and “Twitter” or through electronic mail. Mostly of web pages offer a good possibility and spaces for attraction of reader’s comments and opinions.*

**Keywords:** media, information technology, newspaper, web

### INTRODUCTION

#### At present

You may communicate in the Internet with anyone and from anywhere. You may read, expand cultural background (or lose your cultural qualities, if you are unwise). You may be informed; you may buy and sell goods and services. Further, you may pay the house and business bills, you may pay and be paid, publish, listen to music, see concerts and movies, attend long-distance school and professional training studies and so on and so forth. There are endless things from the daily life of each of us. Many people have considered Internet as an instrument to transmit broader knowledge to the general public which has definitely access thereto. There, you may read and write; you may comment and be commented. For a very short time you may create a personal website or blog and enter data that none else has. Though, the Internet has the exclusivity of scoops as many videos, pictures or articles would be updated but they would not be published in traditional media outlets. Yet, you may easily post them in Internet, remaining anonymous. At this point, a controversial issue is that Internet may also be non-ethical, considering the nature of subjects it displays. Simultaneously, it may convey more violence than in traditional media but a fresh element is that Internet is advantaged because people or public may choose what they wish to see or read. This is known as the principle of selectiveness.

The greatest development in this new world of information technology occurred from the late 1980s onwards, in each case with an ascending trend. From an evolutionary perspective, a man needed a plough pulled by oxen, horses or tractor to till the land, then he needed a pen and sophisticated tools to write. In respect of Internet you should have a PC and a connection in order to step into the cyberspace universe. The present development worldwide can't be conceived without the world of computer.

## **INTERNET IN ALBANIA**

“Internet was first introduced in Albania in 1991 by «Soros» Foundation for its need of communication with other centers in the Eastern Europe and with the headquarters in the USA”<sup>‡</sup>). For many years neither relevant laws, nor experience were present in Albania for the use of this new service, thus causing a stalemate to the further development of the Albanian society. Due to media law liberalization basically after 1997, the media operators and other stakeholders had the opportunity to discover the world of Internet which, if commercialized, would be the luxury of that time. This rapid development would also continue in the period where basic infrastructure would be established in the international connection.

Following several efforts, in February 1998 Albania would have a special law on telecommunications. This would further make a large number of companies join the competition to provide this service, unknown to the general public but too effective in what the Internet contained. Indisputably, its importance would be eventually realized but at the time of drafting of the law it was only a term heard and was tangible only for a few persons. One of the first distributors was Intellectual Communication Center-Albania with address [www.icc-al.org](http://www.icc-al.org), operating as an NGO, with the view of distributing “free internet access” for the sister organizations. That was an initiative essentially “imported” from abroad and well adapted to the current Albanian reality. In 1998, it underwent a second stage with [www.abissnet.com.al](http://www.abissnet.com.al) and [www.adanet.net](http://www.adanet.net), in which Internet was firstly used for commercial purposes. The two above distributors are part of two important Albanian financial groups: 2K-Grup and ADA-Grup, which had already tested themselves in “conventional media”, both print and electronic one.

However, the establishment of these “providers” was rather linked with the desire to join the market of Internet service providers than with the need of using a new medium which would be reached on a step by step basis. Since they had proper economic conditions, they could create and provide Internet services within a reasonably short time but only for the market because the media they were running after a short while would be supplied with such technology. In a third stage, companies were affirmed as Internet service providers, which until that time dealt with hardware or software trading and distribution. Initiatives such as [www.interalb.net](http://www.interalb.net), [www.albinfo.com](http://www.albinfo.com), [www.san.com.al](http://www.san.com.al) or [www.adn.net.al](http://www.adn.net.al), and [www.albaniaonline.net](http://www.albaniaonline.net), would be launched by proficient computer experts.

This differed from the first two stages when the financially fit companies purchased to build this new service. Such a rapid development during 1998 – ‘99 is also explained by the establishment of appropriate infrastructure in the international connection. There were two basic connections wherefrom Albania was supplied with Internet via optical fibers. One is the north-south line passing from Croatia to Greece through Albania. The other one is the east-west line coming to Albania from Italy to follow the direction of Turkey through Macedonia and Bulgaria.

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<sup>‡</sup> Quote from Internet: <http://alt-crew.top-me.com/tutorials-mesime-f24/si-4krj>

During these 18 years a lot of companies were founded, especially in big cities of the country providing Internet use. It is already clear for everyone that Internet use is a prerequisite for Albania in general and for the Albanian youth in particular. Being situated in a favorable geographic position in terms of the cyberspace traffic, with a fairly small population and a powerful intellectual potential of young people, Albania is most likely to be ranked as one of the most advanced countries in this area with strong will and great efforts towards the future. Some others would believe that Albania has many other problems to resolve or set other priorities and this might be a luxury or not an indispensable benefit in the present circumstances. These skeptical persons would receive a quite rational answer. When we have such a vital national youth capacity, why should we not excel for upgrading our knowledge for the empirically intangible world, along the countries with a flow of information? If we see the current Internet use at national level, the capital would break the records for the number of its users. The Albanian districts barely use Internet.

### **Traditional Media and Adoption of Internet**

With the introduction of Internet the journalists managed to expand their vision and knowledge but this knowledge in no case is deemed as absolute truth. Books and newspapers were originally traditional media. Eventually, radio was introduced in the market as a threat or division of the public between the two first media. Once the television emerged, the position of other media was shaken as they attempted to survive. Very soon those media outlets would be supplied with Internet, representing a threat to other means of public communication and a current superpower for the public communication.

This new technology presently termed as, Internet' not only placed the traditional media under a more comfortable position but also encouraged them with a greater drive to carry out their work for journalistic publications. Once, there were many journalists who did not know how to use Internet or even worse, they still used typing machines to type their own articles. Those partisans of that time, being also influenced by the modern technology, were either adapted to the legitimacy of Internet, using computers and benefits derived from Internet, or were excluded from the labor market. The traditional media was rapidly adapted to Internet, so that to simplify work and transmit information in real time, arguing between competitive media not any longer over the news publication one day later but already discussing about its transmission within a few seconds. The correspondent would go to the scene about an event that might occur in a remote district but in any way he could report the news immediately from the scene. Instead, he had to report the news the following day. Presently, this is fully possible due to Internet where within a record time the journalist may write a news report which is classified as "flash" news and may send it only in a few seconds to the editorial offices. After some hours he could apply thereto all journalistic rules, making it trustworthy for the public and informing it by this media. Email or Messenger, which is very actively used by the journalists in Albania, has brought another benefit. This instrument provides the opportunity of exchanging information with other journalists of the same area and to set appointments for the following day with various source contacts or colleagues. Not to mention the fact that due to Internet, traditional media have managed to build their own highly beneficial archives.

Many publishers of newspapers have started to be involved in a debate about the mission of newspapers and other related components. There is a confusing situation in Albania, in the circumstances of a lack of a genuine media regulation, starting from printing, distribution up to sales. Most of media outlets in Albania are supported by too suspicious financial resources. The publishers of these media admit that advertisements represent the benefit they have for the continued publication of their newspapers. Many scholars deem the survival of

newspapers in the market only from advertisements, as an anti-newspaper not serving public interests. These scholars and media analysts argue that such a medium cannot differently operate, other than on the basis of interests of product advertisers, thus creating a totally unilateral dependence. However, according to the publisher of “TEMA” newspaper, Mr. Mero Baze “the crises faced by the press are linked with three components<sup>§</sup>):

1. Contents of newspaper
2. Absence of sales structure
3. Absence of subscriptions

The content of newspaper deals with what is written there, reminding that there is not any longer an experienced and reputable reporter you may refer to or read the newspaper or that the investigation is totally missing. As regards the sale, -he continues- with the increase of the number of newspapers in the market, for a common salesperson it is sufficient to go out in the morning for two or three hours in order to earn his profits and then close the newspaper stand, without having either a moral contract. In addition, we may cite the newspaper subscriptions deriving profits worldwide and have the single security of newspapers to stay in the market. In Albania such a trend varies from 10 to 20 %<sup>\*\*</sup>). However, via new technology and Internet, the press is able to receive feedback from its readers, exploring hot and significant topics of concern for the readers. Presently, the publishers are looking for new means and advanced technologies, in order to follow the current trends and to save the newspapers from inevitable bankruptcy and abandonment from its most faithful readers.

Being aware that mentalities are eventually inherited, our traditional media outlets of the communist regime were means of an extraordinary propaganda. One of the cases of the use of mediums as a means of propaganda and way of superficial thinking was Radio Illyria. The communist regime started to produce the first radios in the country<sup>††</sup>) under the motto ‘Let us work to produce with our own efforts’. These radios had a mystical power. Apart from looking like nests where the Party voice was articulated, daily influencing the citizens in their chores and actions, they also represented an additional ground to confuse the opinions or information coming from the west.

Having a faulty past, our traditional media had reached the “delirium” of freedom. With the introduction of Web, even those pieces of news or information that were considered as non-ethical and prohibited to be transmitted, may be found in the legendary Internet. This freedom often seems to lack professional ethics and is growingly affecting the interests and private life of many persons. None cares about that. It has even become a visible threat from the amateurs who may threaten their own peers by compromising videos or photographs. All this occurs only because technology has managed to penetrate so deeply where people are denied their private life.

### ***Online Journalism, Priorities and Flaws***

Initially, around 1990-s when the world was introduced to the World Wide Web, many analysts believed that this new medium would distort the traditional media and would shortly exclude it from the market. Thus, many publishers started to view a new future of their media, fully depending on Internet. However, for the sake of truth, the emergence of a new online medium did not jeopardize traditional media but in a way helped the survival of newspapers in the market.

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<sup>§</sup> Baze, Mero; “Gazeta Shqip”, 27 August 2008.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Baze, Mero; “Gazeta Shqip”, 27 August 2008.

<sup>††</sup> Quoted from Internet: <http://soemz.euv-frankfurt-o.de/media-see/newmedia/main/article/pdf>

In addition, the web journalism further advanced, being outlined in a fully independent media, with distinguishable features and characteristics, making it one of the main sources of information in the market. The web journalism uses technology to transmit news accurately and comfortably for its readers. Due to this growing technology, the web journalists are daily increasing their audience in the website, making it more popular to the readers and the wide population. However, the web has some distinguishable features from other media making it unique in its kind.

### Topics of Websites and Their Contents

The online websites I have investigated are equally diverse in terms of content and with an attractive view. If we initially look at [www.balkanweb.com](http://www.balkanweb.com). We would be firstly impressed by the logo in capital letters representing this website<sup>††</sup>). Visibly inserted on the left side at the top of the page, it opens the homepage of a credible webpage, both from the reputation and the most rapidly updated national websites. The opposite occurs with the webpage of another rapidly updated website, i.e. the newspaper [www.shekulli.com.al](http://www.shekulli.com.al)<sup>§§</sup>). In this site, we will note on the left side of the top page, an advertisement attracting the attention of the earliest reader or visitor, to be followed by another advertisement but in smaller dimensions. The name of the website is moved a little below to the center of the page, in capital bold letters. A feature distinguishing the two websites is that the first has in the center of the page the first and main article associated with a large photograph being qualitatively distinguished from other news. Meanwhile, the website of “Shekulli” displays a video for the main news, having a caption with a summary of the news in the video. The third website but not the least important in terms of view and content, is [www.top-channel.com](http://www.top-channel.com)<sup>\*\*\*</sup>). Even this website is rapidly updated and is largely visited nationally. Clearly distinguished from the other two online webpages, this one has a clear logo once you join the page and with almost no advertisements in its homepage thus indicating it is a webpage mostly intended for advertising TV programs it represents and transmitting the latest news in real time. These websites which have different development histories, independent from each other and with different ways of transmitting news, are already the most cliqued websites, being affirmed for a high level of integrity and reliability. In addition, they mostly serve as a source of information for other media and for the immigrants and the worldwide Diaspora. Although they have been put on the market for a while, these websites managed to be credible in the face of international stakeholders, which, through information they collect, produce various reports and promote public diplomacy in the host country.

### Perspective of Traditional and Online Journalism

*“We may truly admit that journalism has definitely created a new life for people, full of progress, priorities and troubles. This voice of the mankind we hear when we wake up tells us how the mankind lived the past, confessing at times major truths or frightening lies but always testifying each step of human beings and heralding the hours of collective life. Isn’t this a great benefit in spite of its disasters and hardships?...”<sup>†††</sup>*

Yet, often a question arises requiring an answer from the journalists and other stakeholders using Internet. *What does actually Internet represent for a journalist?* Although the question is very complex and involves a lot of thoughts, we may reply that presently for a journalist Internet represents the opportunity to follow the pace of XXI century.

<sup>††</sup> Website: [www.balkanweb.com](http://www.balkanweb.com)

<sup>§§</sup> Website: [www.shekulli.com.al](http://www.shekulli.com.al)

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Website: [www.top-channel.tv](http://www.top-channel.tv)

<sup>†††</sup> Barbier Frederik – Lavenir Bertho Catherina; *Historia e Medias*, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, Tiranë 2004, page 172.



Internet is generally changing almost all types of social relationships, financial flows and information which is also a flow as all others. To publish information in the Internet means to integrate it in a much more global context of the dissemination of information. Internet, as all informatics platforms, embodies an opportunity to continue the profession of the journalist, so that to continue to search news, structuring, organizing, shaping and attempting to circulate it. This is planned to be a spontaneous vision of the journalist in the following century.

The next question is posed a little differently. *Is there still room for the journalists at the time of Internet?* This question is raised in the debate how the journalist's profession changes with the emergence of Web. Some may give a negative answer, stating that the journalists will become inactive because the readers may elicit information by themselves. Some others answer affirmatively because in the large stream of information the journalists are more than ever required in their role as expert filters. This occurs because there is always an oversaturated flow of information but in each case paying too little attention to what is circulated or transmitted.

Another more important issue for the online journalism is credibility. In the network chaos it is hard to distinguish the real news from the fake news. Though, the issue is not properly addressed and is rather inflated by the representatives of traditional information. Of major risks threatening the information quality is the hurry to publish the news as soon as possible, without taking care of its accuracy. This should be deemed a serious risk posed to the affirmed media agencies affirmed for the trust of the public. In comparison to the print version press, this may be regulated by a speed which often, if reached in time, may be called neither mistake, nor inaccuracy.

## CONCLUSIONS

*“All innovations or technologies are the extension or self-mutilation of our bodies and these extensions strongly require the establishment of new rapports or a new balance with other bodies and with other body extensions...”<sup>\*\*\*</sup>*

The traditional media is an instrument introducing to the readers a reality, though conventional while Internet is interactive. It is often called an endless universal library, which we ourselves consult and by which we may build a dialogue with other people.

Notwithstanding all its shortcomings, Internet may restore a specific identity to the one personalized by the television and had descended to the level of “passive user and consumer”.

*It is often posed the question if Internet will take over television and other traditional media.* As long as these two mass communication tools are not co-measurable, they will have no possibility to assimilate each other. These two instruments, having nothing common with each other, will coexist for a long time without confronting each other, by cooperating and sophisticating the communication tools.

In this context, we remember the beginnings of first mediums, how radio competed press and theater, challenging them with radio drama and concerts. Alternatively, the TV attempted to take over the cinema and radio altogether with those media already integrated into the radio. If we refer to a stream of thought, Internet has still not reached the maximum maturity to include the TV or other mediums. Ironically, the new emerged media, after strongly competing and overshadowing for a while the “old” media not only cannot replace but further strengthen them, offering them flourishing periods.

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> MC Luhan, Marshall; *Për të kuptuar mediat*, first edition, 1964; translated from French., Paris 1968, page. 65.

If we looked behind, how the press turned from a simple technology to an editorial mechanism, the answer would be the Pleiades of Gutenberg. There, you will find the threat of the spider's web wrapping the whole world.

The emergence of online media has coincided with the concept that the consumer had started to hate advertisements or they were too sophisticated to perceive the idea for which they were created and sold. Yet, without having another opportunity to pay their pages, the online journalism used the advertisement as a financial means for survival. Without being aware of the investments about online journalism, the advertisement currently prevails.

It is hard to determine the level of investments for the online journalism or to put it differently, the new media, while the traditional media (newspaper, radio, television, magazines) has still a powerful influence on the public opinion and a large audience.

Internet, as a platform for information, continues to be growingly expanded, improved and consolidated, thus offering more options to its users (including journalists). However, not all online news is simultaneously advancing. This is most visible in the element of audience.

Though Internet, as an alternative, is increasingly attracting its users, the increase of the audience of news in Internet is not proportionate. We may freely admit that within a short time Internet will be the most powerful media.

As never before, there is a huge amount of information available to the general public but the job of professionals to filter oversaturated information is always necessary. The Web obliges the journalists to enhance their professional skills and face challenges arising from an excellent interaction with the readers.

It is an opportunity not to be wasted in order to generally improve the journalist's job, launching a new more meticulous and democratic phrase.

The quality of Internet service, media development in the country and investment in the sector of multimedia information in the web demonstrate the priority attached to this sector. The Internet use in Albania is still limited, influenced by the technological development in the country, services provided by ISP-s in the market, as well as the percentage of users of the new information technologies. The media in Albania being online is deemed not only as a present requirement but also as a good opportunity of marketing and contact for the information they serve.

The traditional media may really compete with online journalism and for as long as the ISP-s and a series of other technological factors will not be subject to a real revolution in Albania.

Traditional media has a very strong advantage, namely, the trust of the public which has fully supported it and will continue to support it as long as the online journalism has not established its strict rules to be applied.

However, I truly admit that in a near future the web journalism will be the guide of successful mediums in the country.

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