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REVISITING HALLIN AND MANCINI'S MEDIA MODEL: ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the professional standards of journalists in Albania and Kosovo to determine the relevance of Hallin and Mancini's media system in the age of digital journalism and social media. This is because the media system continues to be an important analytical tool for understanding the fundamental characteristics of national media and comparing media sectors across countries. A qualitative method was utilized to elucidate this, with semi-structured interviews performed with 22 television and digital journalism editors and journalists, as well as social media managers in Albania and Kosovo. The findings indicate that although television stations continue to target traditional audiences using professional journalism standards, journalists in digital journalism and social media compromise on professional standards to give the public what they want. Although Hallin and Mancini's media system as an analytical framework for evaluating media models remains useful, the criteria for evaluating them should be changed in light of changes in the media environment over the last two decades.

Keywords: *media system, digital journalism, social media, Hallin and Mancini, newsworthiness.*

Introduction

The development of information technologies and the widespread use of social media have fundamentally changed the landscape of media systems today. In today's networked society, (Castells, 2015, 2009) the relationship between media, politics, media ownership, journalism standards, and the public has changed. These are the main indicators that have served so far in the evaluation of media systems (Hallin, 2020; Mancini, 2020; Stępińska & Hallin, 2023; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Two monumental works have dominated studies since the last century on the relationship between media, audience, media professionalism, and the role of the state in this relationship: Four *Theories of the Press* published in 1956 by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, and its successor *Comparing Media Systems* published in 2004 by Hallin and Mancini prove the power of media typologies (Brüggemann et al., 2014).

The first work, *Four Theories of the Press*, provided a historical overview of the functioning of the media in political systems, as well as the role of media ownership, the political system, the role of the state, and the social responsibility of the media. These four theories of the press with a historical character were: (a) the authoritarian, which historically has been in kingdoms and dictatorships, with censorship and control by the state; (b) libertarian, present in liberal-democratic countries and which is the opposite of authoritarian theory; (c) social responsibility, mainly in democratic European countries (with a code of journalists, ethics, improvement of journalist standards) and, (d) Soviet communist theory of the press, where there are no private media, where there is censorship, and the state controls everything (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956). Influenced by the Cold War and political theories, these theories focused more on the ownership of the media and who controls them; they focused more on the relationship between the press and the government than between the press and the audience. These theories dominated media systems studies for several decades.

With the fall of the communist system in Europe and the former USSR, the typologies of the media system changed. In 2004 Hallin and Mancini in their work *Comparing Media Systems*, rightly predict the replacement of press theories. "It is time to give it a decent burial and move on to the development of more sophisticated models based on real comparative analysis" (p. 10). They have proposed four principal dimensions for comparing media systems: "The structure of media markets, including, particularly, the degree of development of the mass circulation press; the degree and form of political parallelism; the development of journalistic professionalism; and the degree and form of state intervention in the media system" (p. 296). As a result of these four indicators, Hallin and Mancini (2004) distinguish the following press models: (a) Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model, with weak professionalism, intervention, and subsidy of the media by the state, which includes: France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain; (b) the North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model, with strong professionalism, institutionalized self-regulation, with state intervention but with the protection of freedom of the

press, and subsidies from the state, which model includes: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland; and, (c) the North Atlantic or Liberal Model, with strong professionalism but non-institutional self-regulation, dominated by the market (except for strong public broadcasting in Britain and Ireland). This model includes the UK, USA, Canada, and Ireland.

However, the last three of these theoretical models have analyzed the media landscape of the period before the widespread use of online media. The digital age of journalism and social media has brought fundamental changes in the way the public today receives information from the media and interacts with it. Hallin in 2023, almost two decades after he wrote *Comparing Media Systems*, emphasizes that two essential changes have occurred today regarding the media system: the first is that the Internet has restructured the media market, and the second, there are changes in professionalism and journalism standards (Stępińska & Hallin, 2023). This paper will deal with the last dimension, comparing today's professionalism of journalism in two countries: Albania and Kosovo.

This paper aims to analyze today's professional standards of journalists in these two Balkan countries to see how applicable Hallin and Mancini's theory is today in the era of digital journalism and social media. This is because the “media system remains a valuable analytical instrument for understanding fundamental institutional aspects of national media and for comparing media industries across countries” (Waisbord, 2020, p. 44).

Literature review

Hallin and Mancini's indicator media systems

Hallin and Mancini (2004) in identifying three media models in Euro-Western countries, have taken as a basis four indicators or “dimensions” as they call them, which are: the media market, journalistic professionalism, political parallelism, and the state's role. Other studies have also relied on these four dimensions (e.g., Humprecht et al., 2022; Fletcher, Cornia & Nielsen, 2020). Hallin in 2023 underlines that although the four dimensions proposed almost 20 years ago still work quite well, the media market today is fragmented and has become quite complex, and any scientific contribution requires methodological caution and modesty due to the multiplicity of media that exist today compared (Stępińska & Hallin, 2023).

As for the media market indicator, Hallin & Mancini (2004) explain this with the circulation of the press in a country, or in other words, how much the press is read in a certain country. In 2000, Norway had the most readers per 1,000 adults, with 719 newspapers, followed by Finland with 545, Sweden with 541, Switzerland and the United Kingdom with around 400, while the fewest readers were Spain and Italy with about 120 newspapers, and finally Portugal and Greece with about 80 newspapers per 1,000 adults (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 23). They also observed large gender differences in Southern European countries where women read far fewer newspapers than men. Gender gaps range from a 35 percent difference between male and female readership in

Portugal to only one percent in Sweden. This indicator includes other economic factors that also affect the media market, including the spread of the press in certain segments of society, such as the working class.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) associate the indicator of professionalization in journalism with the adequate education and knowledge of journalists and specifically with the principles that the journalist then applies in the workplace during the exercise of the profession. These professional dimensions are a) the autonomy of the journalist and the community of journalists about organizations and ownership as well as to those for whom they write. Here the journalist must have autonomy between what represents quality versus popular press; (b) Distinct professional norms, which mean that in addition to respecting the ethical codes that also mean the autonomy between advertising and editorial content, what is more important, has to do with newsworthiness. So, the journalist must have professional standards in what constitutes news. (c) Public service orientation, which means that journalists must consider the interest of the public.

Remaining on the professionalization indicator, Hallin and Mancini (2004) underline that in the Democratic Corporatist countries and North Atlantic or Liberal Model countries, there is an early and strong development of journalistic professionalism. This indicator in the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model, professionalism is weaker. The Democratic Corporatist countries are characterized by consolidated liberal institutions and developed civil society, while power has been limited and freedom of the press has been developed from early on. Professionalism is something that is a broad social development, and not something that is purely internal to journalism. According to Stępińska and Hallin (2023), to succeed, a high level of journalistic professionalism must be encouraged by the owner of the media and by the public. Today this does not happen as much as previously.

For Hallin and Mancini (2004), the third indicator, political parallelism, means the proximity of the media to political trends. Current studies consider this as the polarization of political elites, and ideologies, but also of news audience behavior, which is positioned around two poles, left-right news audience polarization (Fletcher, Cornia & Nielsen, 2020). Based on one of the indicators of media systems, political parallelism or polarization, Fletcher, Cornia & Nielsen, (2020) have analyzed 12 countries related to the left or right political polarization as well as the polarization of receiving information between online and offline, finding that the most ideologically polarized audience is the one that consumes information online compared to the one that consumes information offline.

The fourth and final indicator, the role that the state, can play as owner, regulator, and financier of the media is rooted in more general differences in the role of the state in society; there are differences between liberal democracies such as in the USA and democracies of the welfare states prevailing in Europe, with many distinctive nuances. The state has a more active role in Europe and no role in terms of media in the USA, due to the capitalist tradition (Hallin &

Mancini, 2004). The governing system, the majority system, liberalism vs. corporatism, and religious traditions also play a role here.

Meanwhile, Hallin and Mancini in 2004 in *Comparing Media Systems* did not go too deep into the media system concept. A system would mean a set of interconnected elements that interact autonomously and are heterogeneous. Hallin gives this explanation in 2020, emphasizing that in the 2004 book, they did not give importance to the explanation of the concept. "A media system is typically made up of many different institutions, different sectors that often operate according to quite different logics. Often these may conflict or compete with one another; they do, however, interact with one another and influence one another" (Hallin, 2020, p. 5778). On the other hand, the other author of the same book, Paolo Mancini, 2020 gives another definition for media systems. He admits that he had a misunderstanding with Hall regarding the definition, which is why both authors appear in the same year with two articles in the same issue of the *International Journal of Communication*. According to Mancini (2020), media systems are "abstract constructions that are necessary to bring back to unity dispersed features of communication structures and cultures that are observable in a real-world" (p. 5764).

Table 1 Original Dimensions and Models of Media Systems

Dimension	Model		
	Mediterranean Polarized Pluralist	Northern European Democratic Corporatist	North Atlantic Liberal
Press market	Low	High	High
Political	High	High	Low
Journalistic professionalism	Low	High	High
Role of the state	High	High	Low
Countries	ES, FR, GR, IT, PT	AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, FI, NL, NO, SE	CA, GB, IE, US

Source: Brüggemann et al., 2014, p. 1042; Hallin & Mancini, 2004.

Hallin and Mancini's models have played an important role in the last two decades in comparative media studies (Humprecht, 2022). They have become the point of reference for many comparative studies of journalism and political communication (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Strömbäck, Orsten, & Aalberg 2008; Voltmer, 2013). However, there have been criticisms because the study did not include new forms of digital communication, and many countries of the world were not included in that study beyond European and Western countries (Brüggemann et al., 2014). The study did not include religion in the

measurement indicators (Couldry, 2005); there are methodological and operational weaknesses and the dividing line between the communicative and political dimensions in their work remains unclear (Norris, 2011, 2009).

The transformation of indicator 'journalism professionalism'

Since this present paper deals only with the dimension of journalism professionalism of Hallin and Mancini (2004) where the most important element is newsworthiness, it is appropriate to explain this concept as well as the changes that have occurred since they explored the issue. Simply put, newsworthiness means what we have to consider as we turn an event into news, what constitutes news (Meijer, 2022), or why an event is reported as news (Tandoc, 2014). In other words, which arguments should be considered for one event to receive media coverage and not the other? This has traditionally included three variables: event, context, and national traits (Atad, 2017; Strömbäck, Karlsson & Hopmann, 2012). But, today, the news is what aims to “provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021, p. 23). In journalism, news consists of three main elements: the facts, the sources, and the presentation of the news (Pavlik, 2019). Traditionally, journalists use authoritative sources as facts to protect themselves from criticism and appear to be objective (Kelsey, 2018; Richardson, 2007). But, considering the preferences of the public for talk shows, soap operas, or different narratives with ordinary people, what often appears on television, therefore, resembles a narcissistic mirror (Bourdieu, 1998). Therefore, today's journalism should not be seen only from the perspective of professional journalism, but also from the perspective of narrative studies, entertainment studies, and human-computer interaction studies (Meijer, 2020) because “news users also appreciate a captivating presentation, a gratifying narrative, and layered information” (Meijer, 2022, p. 232). In today's digital journalism immediacy, interactivity, and participation have become the main principles where social media also has an important role (Usher, 2014). All this is because today the media have increased in number with correspondingly more intense competition. Media fight for survival, to increase the number of audiences for more advertising as well as to entice the audience to pay for online news (Olsen, 2021; Myllylahti, 2019).

According to the indicators that Hallin and Mancini (2004) have considered in the analysis of media systems, today the media markets and journalism have experienced an immense change, due to the development of information technologies and the widespread use of social media. Hallin himself admits in 2023 that journalism has become fragmented, the objectivity of some journalists has been questioned, partisan media have increased, and the relationship between the audience and the media has changed (Stępińska & Hallin, 2023). Meanwhile, the other author of *Comparing Media Systems*, Paolo Mancini admits in 2020 that the biggest weakness of their study is the lack of inclusion of the digital revolution and that today “the digital media have become so important that, in some aspects, they challenge the entire interpretive framework that we suggested” (p. 5761).

Newsrooms today have turned their gaze away from the public because the public today is online. Society today is platformed (van Dijck & Waal, 2018) and we have a global online society where social and economic traffic interact, where the individual is often guided by online algorithms. Even today, information is increasingly obtained from Facebook and Twitter (Newman et al., 2020). In 2021, 27 percent of Britons were informed by the news they received through social media (Newman et al., 2021). In 2022, the Reuters Institute of the University of Oxford confirmed that Facebook remains the most used social media in the world despite the rise of Twitter and Instagram, but at the same time, it remains the main social media for obtaining information, from which about 40 percent of Europeans are informed (Newman et al., 2022). Never in human history have people received more information from Facebook and Google than via any news organization (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022, p. 1). Focusing on the preferences of the public is largely attributed to the emergence of social media and its widespread use by the public. This use of social media has become an addiction, especially among the younger generation (Saqib & Amin, 2022; Lim et al., 2020). For example, in Kosovo, one of the countries that this paper deals with, recent measurements show that over 90 percent of teenagers have a smartphone and 90 percent of them use the Internet for social media (Saliu et al., 2022). Social media provides news outlets with valuable audience data in the form of followers, shares, and likes (Shin & Ognyanova, 2022, p. 579).

Changes are also evident in newsrooms (Houston, 2023). Previously, news was produced in the newsroom, while recently the number of freelancers has increased, as journalists perform their work outside the newsroom and in a networked manner (Deuze & Witschge 2019). But, with online media, the possibility for journalism to be done outside the newsroom has increased. The opportunity for more journalists to be media entrepreneurs has also increased; the media manager must find more balance between the editorial work and the professional work of journalism, as the traditional meaning of journalism has changed (Deuze & Witschge 2019; Hölsgens et al., 2020). Journalists today also engage in social media, usually using Facebook and Twitter for everything, from breaking news to self-promotion, political discussions, political opinions, and sharing mundane details about their daily activities, considering social media as a complement to their primary work (Rogstad, 2014). Journalists and media outlets across Europe use social media to promote stories, share news reports, and expand their audiences (Barberá, Vaccari & Valeriani, 2017).

Individuals do not share news on social media only for their informational curiosity, but also for their political engagement (Dwyer & Martin, 2017). The social interactions of the individual are evaluated by the presence and activities in social media (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020), and social media are seen as “nodes connected by ties that represent relationships or interactions” (McHugh & Perrault, 2022 p. 2). Even the victory or loss of elections cannot be analyzed today without addressing the engagement of political actors and new audiences in social media (Calvo et al., 2023; Hristoski, Nedelkoska, Boskoska Klisaroski, 2014).

But journalism is a verification discipline (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). More information is available than ever before, but it lacks authenticity and critical thinking today (Koceva & Mirascieva, 2018). Credibility is challenged even more with social media because anyone today with a social media account can spread content, as a medium (Scherer, 2011), even fake news. Fake news is a social media phenomenon. Even though it came out as a concept in 2016, it is just the latest name for the ancient art of lying (Barclay, 2018). Disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda are early representations of this phenomenon. But today the circumstances are new. The Internet, and especially social media networks, have caused fake news to capture the attention of researchers due to the increased potential for wide dissemination through social media (Saliu, 2022). "Fake news is intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers" (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). Two main motivations underlie the production of fake news: financial and ideological (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017). Fake news is used by politicians around the world to discredit news organizations (Tandoc, Jenkins & Craft, 2019), to discredit information they do not agree with, and to delegitimize political opponents (Farkas & Schou, 2018). Therefore, the credibility of the media today is questioned as never before in history (Mor & Reich, 2018).

These are also new circumstances that were not in the media landscape when Hallin & Mancini (2004) analyzed media systems and the professionalism of journalists as one of the dimensions of the systems.

These transformations are related to the return of the gaze towards the public, influenced by click metrics, and certainly affect the quality and professionalism of journalists. News values today are those values that present attractiveness to the public. This affects the basic professional standards of journalists related to objectivity, gatekeeping, and transparency (Oppehaffen & d'Haenens, 2015). When journalists keep their eyes on the public's preferences, they also dramatize the news to make it more interesting for the public and follow this public and its reactions on social media, thus damaging the quality of journalism (Sricaracom, 2023; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016).

Those media that have already installed audience measurement systems and social media news analytics in their newsrooms to measure the value of their product (Kristensen, 2023) have the most attention from the audience. Therefore, online entertainment is an important element today, and for this reason, the media seeks to stimulate emotions to be more attractive to the public (Parks, 2021). Traditional media is already multiplatform: televisions have their text portals; there are also videos, and the biggest distribution is through social media. Therefore, these are seen as partners that should be considered by newsrooms because that is where people find the news (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022) and interact with the information they find, commenting on or sharing information that the public likes (van Dijck & Waal, 2018).

These are important changes that are observed today compared to the descriptions of journalistic professionalism made by Hallin and Mancini in their theoretical models almost 20 years ago. Therefore, to analyze the journalism

professionalism indicator by Hallin and Mancini (2004), we ask two research questions:

RQ1: What role do public preferences play in editorial and news selection?

RQ2: How do journalists manage to balance professionalism and public preferences

Methodology

Hallin and Mancini (2004) have used publicly available data from national and international statistical entities on four indicators: media market, journalistic professionalism, political parallelism, and the state's role. Current studies also acted in the same way as media systems studies (e.g., Humprecht et al., 2022; Brüggemann, 2014). However, these four dimensions or indicators introduced above may be used as independent variables or values to explain variations in, for instance, media content or journalistic attitudes and practice (Brüggemann, 2014), which can explain and measure similarities and differences between countries (Humprecht et al., 2022). This is the approach that this study follows, being defined only for journalistic professionalism in the digital age indicator, but with primary sources.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) followed a quantitative method, but in terms of making comparisons in space and time in communications, the practice of the qualitative method requires attention to the best way to design and conduct such research (Downey, 2020). Since this study deals only with journalists' attitudes about news and work in the newsroom, the qualitative method is already consolidated in media studies (Kristensen, 2023). Herrero and colleagues (2017) also used qualitative methods to study media systems.

Our questions also find support in previous studies such as what is the role of audience metrics in news selection (Lamot & Paulussen, 2020; Tandoc, 2014). The qualitative study of the newsroom is an effective method for this problem because the researcher defines some key themes that he wants to explore (Nelson & Tandoc, 2019). This role of the journalist comes from the perception he has of what is expected of him, his personality, integrity, attitudes, knowledge, professional ideals, and the challenges in the era of digital journalism (Weder et al., 2023; Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc 2018).

Therefore, this study used semi-structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), which are quite useful to obtain the same information from all participants and to analyze their opinion and attitude (Pajo, 2018). Twelve journalists were interviewed in Albania, six of whom work in traditional media, four in online/news portal media, and two social media managers. Ten journalists in Kosovo were interviewed, five of whom work in traditional media and four in online news outlets, and one as a social media manager.

The topics that were addressed with these journalists were the professionalism of the journalists, i.e. how much the journalists respect the professional standards, considering the new environment of online information and social media; how much they consider public preferences; how they manage to balance public preferences with professional journalistic standards. In Kosovo, considering that since April 2020 no paper newspaper has been

published, down from the 10 newspapers that were published before. The focus is more on portals (instead of the newspaper). Some of the main media whose journalists have been interviewed are Klan Kosova, ATV, RTK, Vision Plus, RTSh, Albeu.com, Report Tv, and Klan News.

Since one of the authors lives in Albania, she conducted the interviews there, while the other two authors conducted interviews in Kosovo. All these interviews were recorded and then transcribed for ease of analysis and comparison. For comparison, the interviews were placed in NVivo software (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Results

Albania and Kosovo are two Balkan countries that have separate media markets, with norms and regulatory institutions for the media that license televisions and radios in both countries. Due to cable television platforms, most of Albania's television is also watched in Kosovo, but less often the other way around. Festivals, reality shows, and political debates in one or the other country, often have characters from both countries. Meanwhile, online media are reciprocally followed. Until recently, a news portal of Kosovo was ranked the most read of all Albanian online media in the Balkans, while in 2023 it is reported that the reality show Big Brother of Albania is also the most watched in Kosovo. So, it can be said that due to the same language, the same ethnicity, and culture, these countries have a media market with numerous interactions. The consumption of online media in Kosovo is reported to be greater than in Albania because the population of Kosovo is younger than that of Albania (Eurostat, 2022). For these reasons, in the presentation of the results of the interviews, the division will not be made according to countries, but according to the issues and problems of the media in both countries.

Television journalism, in both Albania and Kosovo, operates on the principles of professional journalism and respect for ethical standards. Important developments in society such as politics, security, social issues, health, and the interest of citizens continue to remain newsworthy for them. “We don't know who the public is and what they want. Those on social media know that. They do their job, we do our job to inform the public in a professional, fair, correct, and impartial way” (TV Journalist, Albania).

Television newsrooms operate as traditional media. But every television newsroom has a website as well as a social media presence. Television newsrooms are separate from social media departments. “The social media department selects and adapts itself the news that will be launched on social media. They work on the criteria of what is trendy for the audience” (TV Editor, Kosovo). Some television editors admit that they often turn the report into storytelling and features to be more attractive to the public. “But we keep the basis of the news, we just tell it in a way that is more interesting to the public” (TV Editor, Kosovo).

The social media department selects things that interest its audience, and this audience is dominated by young people. Television newsrooms are not influenced by what is posted on social media or by web analytics and social

media metrics. However, journalists internalize the dynamics of social media consumption in the newsroom. It is often observed that journalists propose to cover topics on television that have had a great impact on social media (TV Editor, Kosovo; TV Editor, Albania).

Traditional media such as television are in constant competition with social media, with individual social media influencers. The fear of televisions losing their audience, which normally translates into the material benefits of the media, makes the televisions nevertheless make compromises to offer the public what they want. We have to admit that even television has turned its attention away from the public (TV Editor, Kosovo).

During their daily work, journalists often work for two platforms: TV and social media. It often happens that the journalist in the field makes the full report for television or the web, while if he finds something very interesting as a detached part, it is posted on social media.

Young people are more interested in online entertainment than information about the day's developments. In the central news edition that lasts half an hour, we have 10-15 chronicles by journalists. Some of the chronicles are cut and released on social media only, more spicy things, and attractive sequences, but not the chronicle as a whole. It aims a younger audience (TV Editor, Kosovo).

Kosovo has had no paper press since the spring of 2020. However, in Albania, daily printed newspapers continue to work with traditional readers. To maintain print circulation due to the *traditional* newspaper audience and because of the easily obtained material, the newspapers in Albania have many articles from the historical past, that of the communist dictator Enver Hoxha, as well as other figures of the former communist dictatorial system.

We have chosen to preserve our readers and the culture of reading, bringing back every week attractive stories from the monist past, about the stories of monist leaders, about their exploits, crimes, behind the scenes, or about things that were not said before. But we are not the only ones. Other newspapers do the same. And how else can we save the press on paper? (Newspaper Editor, Albania).

In social media, short, often incomplete news that arouses emotion, media products with entertainment, incomplete news, conflicts, parodies or clashes, and impatience or clashes for religious reasons dominate. There have been cases in both Kosovo and Albania television, that journalists are displaced and replaced with reality show news.

Meanwhile, online media are inclined toward public preferences. "As an online newspaper, we are inclined towards videos which we are supported by, right after the ads. For us, the news represents what interests the public, because it brings views, clicks, brings profits", (Online Journalist, Kosovo). In online media, in the morning meeting, the editors discuss what has prompted the most reactions in social media: comments, clicks, shares, and topics. "Then it is required to be treated in a way that again engages the audience" (Editor of Digital newspaper, Kosovo).

According to the news editors of the portals, the news related to entertainment interests the public more as evidenced by daily clicks. “News that we value as quality and important, unfortunately, have few clicks” (Editor of digital journalism, Albania). Journalists feel that the pressure on the media owner has decreased, who aim more for what is popular than what has quality. “If once the news fight was between journalists and the media owner, now the fight has shifted between news editors and social media managers” (TV Editor, Kosovo).

According to social media managers, now is the time for videos. People mostly follow short videos through social media. Web analytics and social media metrics help them know what interests the public the most.

The young generation that is on social media is not interested in news that we journalists value as quality. For us, quality news is what the public needs, e.g. The blocking and detour of the roads in Tirana due to the works is certainly important news for the citizens of the capital (TV Journalist, Albania).

According to journalists, the age of the public also plays a role in the consumption of information. The more mature age is interested in news about politics, while the younger audience is looking for more sensation, music, and entertainment. “When I see what type of news has had great clickability, I certainly try to make the other news of that nature, something that the public likes” (Digital Journalist, Albania)

Journalists admit that quality has generally declined. “It also happens to television journalists, who often think about how the content will look on social media and how attractive it will be. This lowers the quality of reporting” (TV Journalist, Albania).

Discussions

Journalists in Kosovo and Albania generally follow the three dimensions of the development of journalistic professionalism of Hallin and Mancini (2004): (a) autonomy, (b) distinct professional norms, and (c) public service orientation, but separated today according to traditional, digital, and social media.

Journalists’ autonomy from the owner does exist in televisions. Journalists on television today have less pressure from the owner who aims more at what is ‘popular’ than what is ‘quality’ because he found the solution in social media. Television products are cut, shortened, taken out of context, and served on social media to provoke the public. Hallin in 2023, returning to the dimensions of professional journalism from 2004, emphasizes that “You do not have a high level of journalistic professionalization unless media owners accept these roles of journalism and unless the public accepts these roles of journalism” (Stępińska & Hallin, 2023, p. 486). In Kosovo and Albania, this solution was made by separating the products: quality ones on television, popular ones on the web, and especially in social media. This is even felt by journalists in Kosovo, that today the conflict has shifted “between news editors and social media managers” (Digital Journalism editor, Kosovo).

The second dimension, distinct professional norms (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), that of influence advertising has in the presentation of the news has also moved to digital journalism and social media. In Kosovo and Albania, public preferences play a priority role in digital journalism and social media and less so in television. The media use social media not only because they find the public there, but at the same time they use the feedback from the audience to model the next media product on what to offer to the public (Carlson, 2020). This increases the audience and satisfies public preferences to increase the number of those willing to pay for online products (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017). This happened both in Kosovo and in Albania, in digital journalism and social media.

While Kosovo no longer has a paper press, but only online, in Albania the paper press also follows the public's preferences. But we are talking about the traditional public (Guth & Marsh, 2017) who are mainly the third generation and who also lived in the former communist system. Print newspapers are full of nostalgic narratives from the communist past in the style of "what dictator Hoxha said in her ear to Prime Minister...". These specifications answer the first research question about the role of public preferences in editorial and news selection.

In the third dimension, public service orientation (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), televisions in these two countries follow newsworthiness that is of public interest and evaluated by journalists. The public interest generally means the effective participation of informed citizens in social processes (Majhosev, Dzamtoska-Zdravkovska, & Majhosev, 2018). Meanwhile, online media is geared toward important or attractive material as evaluated by the public itself through measurements of online clicks. The balance is achieved in television because television also has web pages and social media. Products are not the same on different platforms. Commercial television remains very important for developments in society. This is aimed at traditional media and mature audiences as well as more cultured audiences. Meanwhile, public televisions in these two countries have little viewership and do not have any significant informative role.

Although some television has changed traditional reporting by introducing the narrative and feature mode into the television chronicles, most of the television in both Kosovo and Albania remain loyal to the professional standards of the news and not to the preferences of the public. But dramatizing the news to make it more interesting for the public damages the quality of journalism (Sricaracom, 2023; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). Since young people today are mostly online and not interested in news, some media outlets are mainly dedicated to young people. Therefore, they are given the spiciest sequences from a television chronicle. So today, platformization (van Dijck & Waal, 2018) has led the media to ponder "[H]ow we serve them and what platforms we use to serve them requires us to know who is in our audience and what they want from us" (Filak, 2019, p. 33). This dedication of the media to the public has not been in the logic of the media systems of Hallin and Mancini (2004), because here we do not ask the question about the standards of

journalism, but about the standards of most of the public. This public has average preferences (Bourdieu, 1998). This simultaneously answers the second research question about the balance between professionalism and public preferences. Professionalism remains more in television and less in television social media.

The traditional media system, which relied on print and broadcast media, has been replaced by a more dynamic and interactive system that incorporates social media and online news platforms. This has made journalists see much more of the public than at the time of Hallin and Mancini's study. Viewing the public's preferences contradicts what has traditionally been considered the value and role of journalism in society: "to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021, p. 23). Whilst people with a background in journalism are not required to work in social media today, people with a background in marketing who will work with news in social media, are (Neilson et al., 2023). Journalism is a verification discipline "what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art" (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2021, p. 131). But today it has transformed in these cases from "Trust me" journalism to "Show me" journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010).

Conclusions

Media systems as an analytical concept for their evaluation, although they are still useful, should revise the criteria for their evaluation, due to the change in the media ecosystem (Waisbord, 2020). This ecosystem is no longer what it was when Hallin and Mancini analyzed media systems in the circumstances of the late 20th and early 21st centuries; it has become more complex. At that time, print was still consumed and represented the highest quality media, television had a wide reach from all generations, while the Internet, although widely used, social media was just beginning to expand. Today the public is fragmented: the mature age continues to follow the television in Kosovo, and in Albania also the newspaper. Youth in both countries are mostly online. Television news continues to follow the standards of quality journalism, while digital journalism and information products on social media follow public preferences and the quality of information is average.

In both countries, the institutional self-regulatory authority operates for traditional media with subsidies from the state for public media and is often clientelist for commercial media from public enterprises under the guise of advertising. The countries cannot be placed in any of the Hallin and Mancini models but lie between the nature of the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model and the North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model. Media systems have changed significantly because of the development of information technologies, while no clear digital typology of the media system has been observed (Humprecht et al., 2022). These changes make the original model of Hallin and Mancini inapplicable in the dimension of professionalization.

The models of Hallin & Mancini (2004) had to do with other political circumstances in which the media acted, while now the changes are such that in many European countries, traditional parties have fallen, while populists have risen on the scene. This has caused the relationship between the media and traditional political structures to break, and the reliability of journalism sources has increased. Even as far as the online interaction of the public is concerned, social media cannot even represent the national media within the media systems. Some time ago we had control and censorship of information and sometimes even propaganda, today with social media we have fake news. The platformization of society (van Dijk et al., 2018) has affected the public value of communication and information.

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