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What are the conditions for business and sustainability of media in BiH?

Survey, research and investigation, conducted by non – government sector and aimed to have free access to information, regarding the amount of public budget money allocated to media houses, failed to provide the general public audience with comprehensive, quantity and quality based information about how much money has been allocated and spent for encouragement and incentive or using of media services. Limiting factors regarding the collection of this kind of information include numerous budgets at all governing levels in BiH; common non-transparency of contest procedures and legal regulations without clear criteria for decisions about allocations of budget money and even misuses of certain provisions indicated in the Law on Free Access to Information. Still and objectively limited surveys and researches clearly outline that most money coming to media houses actually derives from various governing and administrative levels and also from public enterprises. Media houses that have been recognized as critical and considered as socially responsible sources of journalism and that at the same time meet and fulfil all their duties towards the state, clearly found themselves in adverse position comparing to media that prefer institutions, public and utility enterprises, agencies, institutes and other state governing bodies that bring and pass decisions regarding different forms of encouragement and demand of media services. Preferential relationship between governing/ruling bodies and public enterprises towards media clearly outlines the absence and lack of support to media pluralism, including critical and engaged journalism, as important factors required for the development of democratic society.

Media houses, limited in using tax payers' financial grants and other financial means, dispose of alternative financing models, including the applying for specific funds and grants, proposed by foreign investors, financiers and donors, marketing, production of promo contests, and even crowd funding. However, these model types have more certain limits and allow and enable only few media houses with financial stability and careless business scope, including general public interest. Due to lack of finances, journalist and other media professionals have been working under poor conditions; the quality of media reporting is decreasing and media houses have become subjects to political and economic impacts, which resulted in the degradation of journalist reputation.

In this 54th E - Journalist edition we collected texts by **Zoran Ivancic**, from CPI Foundation, **Vanja Stokic**, eTrafika.net editor, **Vuk Vucetic**, senior assistant at the University of East Sarajevo and **Brankica Smiljanic**, freelance journalist from Banjaluka. This E- Bulletin is part of the project implementation "Media and Public Reputation"¹ and represents a contribution to public discussion regarding the issue of transparency of media ownership and advocating for the passing of law that would advance media field and information market in BiH.

Arman Fazlić, E-journalist editor

¹ Project was launched by the Consortium consisting of the following organizations: BH Journalists Association, Press Council of BiH, Media Centre and JaBiHEU (a local NGO), along with financial assistance provided by the European Union.



There is a need for standardization of processes regarding the allocation of public funds to media in BiH

By: Zoran Ivančić

Through the work of CPI Foundation (Public Interest Advocacy Center), we collect, check and release all information regarding budget details at all governing levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including non- budget funds. We often attempted and tried to discover and check certain information, regarding the amount of money that governing official authorities allocate for certain purposes, and to compare this information with non – financial based information and these include the information regarding population statistics in certain areas, number of service users, number of pupils/students in particular areas, number of employees, satisfaction in relation how governing officials manage to fulfill and resolve their problems from their competences point of view etc.), and we couldn't even complete our research and survey once; we couldn't determine and confirm amounts of money being subject to our survey or even determine particular percentage included, as far as this survey is concerned. The reason for this "failure" is most probably the fact that research and survey, regarding money spending by the public sector officials in BiH, has always been considered as rather transcendental, inaccurate and various and different categories usually sums up in the report, creating general confusion. This surely does not happen unintentionally and by accident, as it concerns the governing levels and mechanisms, in regard with government financing biased to war – veteran organizations and associations, including religious communities and naturally, media financing as well.

We are not certain about the amount of money dispersed and aimed directly for the work of private and public media houses, because there are several ways of registering these kinds of transfers, including the following: grants allocated to private enterprises, grants allocated to individuals, grants allocated to organizations, since certain media houses have ties with companies and organizations, financing particular construction works conducted on public buildings and facilities, where the entrepreneur and owner of this building is usually the owner of media house itself, assistance and help aimed to media houses, financing media houses that should monitor the work of municipal administration, monitor financing processes through various greeting commercial advertisements for Christmases, Eiders etc. It is also difficult to follow from which governing levels certain media houses receive grants, funds and get finances. Moreover, no one is following how much money for announcing miscellaneous announcements and releases in media houses is spent by public enterprises, including vacancy ads, greeting messages and posts, advertisement of different kinds, announcements aimed for their end users (clients), etc. Sometimes, journalists and editors receive certain amounts of finances for additional education.

Official politicians are in a position to make impact regarding the allocation of amounts aimed for media houses for various campaigns financed and funded from both, local/domestic and foreign sources. Media campaigns provide political governing levels with an opportunity to conduct money laundry and to get their hands on cash as well. Arresting and investigations in Croatia proved and confirmed that this is quite easy to conduct and implement and we should suspect that these criminal deeds are present in our country too.

In demonstrating the power of control

In demonstrating the power of control over media houses, we should not just refer to a "carrot, but also to stick". Some individuals and governing political parties, including powerful, rich and influential figures, do not hesitate from directing threats, taking revenge and punishing journalists and editors that investigate and write texts, articles or stories that are against their interests.

Events

19 May 2018

Report Assembly and 5th Meeting Session of the Association of BH Journalists Board of Directors held in Sarajevo

15 May 2018

Women in BiH media industry under-rated on governing and managing levels and at the same time subjects to gender based violence

10 May 2018

Public interest and rights to privacy: where is the limit to freedom of expression?

Press releases

20 May 2018

APPEAL TO BiH MEDIA: Make reports on refugees and migrants respecting their human rights and their dignity

09 May 2018

Forgotten journalists' ethics: Help provide by media to institutions causing the spreading of xenophobia of refugees and migrants

Media on media

23 May 2018

Worrying irregularity regarding the spending of budget means aimed for media

22 May 2018

Commercial advertising and other commercial relations between public sector and media: Guidelines for BiH public bodies

Vacancies

Voice of America – editing desk in languages of all three major ethnic groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina posts a vacancy for the position of multimedia reporter. Deadline for application is 30 June 2018

Voice of America – editing desk in languages of all three major ethnic groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina posts a vacancy for the position of science reporter. Deadline for application is 30 June 2018



over media houses, we should not just refer to a “carrot, but also to stick”. Some individuals and governing political parties, including powerful, rich and influential figures, do not hesitate from directing threats, taking revenge and punishing journalists and editors that investigate and write texts, articles or stories that are against their interests. Journalists and editors are therefore very hard to protect from, because the methods of organized crime, pervading with politics, are similar in the whole world. If the vengeance taken against certain journalists would seem easy to identify and recognize by the officials; journalists’ and editor’s family would then consequently become next victims to be punished instead.

Journalists and editors do not get punished by death, as was the case in European Union, namely in Malta and Slovakia where investigative reporters and journalists were murdered and their murders were ordered by governing officials and mafia members. In this case journalist’s female partner was killed because he was investigating the ties and connections between Calabrian Ndargheta with Slovakian government regarding the misuses of EU Funds and Grants.

Just as there is enough room and space for journalists, editors and media entrepreneurs to protect themselves from pressures, manipulations, threats and punishments they are being imposed with, we can also see that there is enough room and space for making the present situation worse, by taking over the legal acquis from European Union practice. We can see that, pursuant to official statements, releases and reactions by the European Union officials, these kind of tragic events were taken with regret by the EU officials and that EU officials publically condemned these accidents and associated occurrences; however they failed to provide protection for journalists and we know that no one took legal responsibility and no one was proceeded for murdering a journalist or journalists.

According to my knowledge, the case of Zeljko Kopanja has never been terminated and successfully completed, despite the fact that all services, both local and foreign, were engaged with this case and involved in investigation process. This was the case of a car bomb assassination attempt on Zeljko Kopanja, who, as a result of severe injuries, lost both his legs and lived as disabled person, which deprived him of normal life. In this text, we shall take a look and review social media field; platforms falsely presented as something else, rather than media houses, so they could eventually avoid material and moral responsibilities for media announcements and releases in media that actually announce these kinds of announcements, releases and statements.

Although glorified at the beginning, as a tool for netting positive, affirmative, progressive society forces, as arms required for the democratization of totalitarian or authoritarian societies with numerous democratic deficits, they have quickly transformed into something opposite, namely they transferred into the tool of conservative and reactionary forces, opponents of human rights, minority rights, migrants rights, women reproductive rights, science opponents cleverness, ecology, vaccine and common sense in general. They also proved to be very effective, easy to handle and use and with great effect in regard with what had been invested.

Greatest and best settled and arranged country systems (USA, United Kingdom, and Germany) have not been able to resist negative effects deriving from social media and accordingly making impact on democratic processes, elections and referendums, and I am therefore convinced that the chances of BiH having settled this field are minimized. Under such conditions, where regularity of election or referendum processes and prevention of manipulation of voters cannot be ensured, certain questions and issues emerge, such as: What is the next stage, which system of participation of citizens in election and control of governments shall be introduced, because the elections process at present, that is, as with fair

There are numerous accepted and implemented recommendations that may serve as steps in the right direction in order to provide and ensure fair and transparent media environment in BiH.

Standardization of processes regarding the allocation of public financial means that would consists of public invitations, public applications, public valuing of applications, public selection of media that are entitled and deserve to be funded, financed, donated or granted, following, measuring and monitoring of accomplished results and effects is possible to obtain

State bodies, regulatory bodies, police and judicial bodies cannot remain passive and observe anomalies occurring on social media pages where (with reasonably limited investments) a great damage (in terms of posting false and incorrect news) can be caused as result, including encouraging specific groups to lynch an individual or groups and common public backwardness.

Free Media Help Line

Actual cases:

Dejan Šajinović - General Secretariat of the People's Assembly of the RS rejected the recommendation by "Nezaivne novine" journalists, regarding the access to information and providing the meeting session official transcript. As far as this specific case is concerned, Free Media Help Line provided journalists with legal aid. After the appeal filed in, by one of the journalists, General Secretariat of the People's Assembly of the RS handed in the transcript.

Ramo Abidović - After sending a notice letter sent by Free Media Help Line to Kalesija Police Official Authorities and regarding verbal threats directed to Ramo Abidovic (a local journalist), by popular local politician and public figure, we received the official reply and answer indicating that this case contained no elements to be legally considered and treated as criminal deed or felony.

Free Media Help Line registered the case of appeal filing pursuant to defamation charges pressed against certain journalist. After nearly a year from the commencement of this legal and legal procedure, court's first instance decision was passed, whereas the appeal (requesting financial compensation) was rejected. **Verdict was based on Article 10 of the European Convention and verdict the exposition referred to the practice of European Court for Human Rights.**

and honest method, is definitely over.

Until all issues are resolved and particular but serious reforms emerge at global level, which shall hopefully include our country, perhaps thorough pre - accession processes, we cannot stand still; do nothing about this issue and despair. There are numerous accepted and implemented recommendations that may serve as steps in the right direction in order to provide and ensure fair and transparent media environment in BiH.

Standardization of processes regarding the allocation of public financial means that would consists of public invitations, public applications, public valuing of applications, public selection of media that are entitled and deserve to be funded, financed, donated or granted, following, measuring and monitoring of accomplished results and effects is possible to obtain.

Failing to follow and fulfil the above mentioned standards should consequently result in fining and penalizing media houses, including penalizing public administrative body that was in charge with allocation process of financial means granted to that media house and finally, fining all persons responsible in this entire process.

Public media houses should be included in regular budget planning procedures, but they should also be obliged to abide defined limits of commercial contents. At present, many of them still receive grants on an ad hoc basis and this is simply a shorter halter for better and more efficient media control.

Complete ownership media structure of all media houses and all ties and connections with legal and physical entities shall, during this and previous year, proactively be posted on official media web sites. All state budgets at all levels, or at least on Entity levels and districts shall be unified and their spending shall be channeled pursuant to professional rules; for optimal range of target groups with minimum investments toward verified information regarding audience viewership, listening and reading information.

State bodies, regulatory bodies, police and judicial bodies cannot remain passive and observe anomalies occurring on social media pages where (with reasonably limited investments) a great damage (in terms of posting false and incorrect news) can be caused as result, including encouraging specific groups to lynch an individual or groups and common public backwardness. Skilled professionals working in institutions and agencies must start with direct launching of effective communication based channels with largest networks and legal experts must start working thoroughly on legislative framework regarding the regulation of social media and networks and also start creating legal foundation for strategic litigation. Without this proactive conduct by the governing official authorities, physical and legal entities in BiH, participants of political processes, entrepreneurs, businessmen, journalists and activists shall remain unprotected and this is exactly where I see the biggest threat for media houses in BiH, including media employees and including media influence and impact on democratic processes in BiH.

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Commercial business or grants: Online media houses between the two extremes

By: Vanja Stokić

It sounds sad, but eTrafika.net (local web site), working as part of the same civil association (with identical name), failed to reach financial stability and sustainability in order to enable proper working, even 6.5 years after they had began with their work. Although despite project activities, through which they may acquire and receive financial incomes, they may also improve and advance their financial stability through commercial advertisement business. However, the sale of their advertising space is almost negligible. Ever since they started operating as a local web site, this web site had somewhere between seven and 10 commercial clients (advertisers) only. During the period of last two years, writing of promotional texts as part of projects aimed for other organizations (that are later forwarded to other media houses) has become more and more frequent within eTrafika.

Association and eTrafika web site were established with the purpose of dealing mainly with journalism, rather than making profit, so the founders, from the very beginning, were focused more on field work and texts (articles) writing, instead of being focused on making necessary profit required for their operational work and financial sustainability. eTrafika teams have so far experienced and managed to survive several financial crises, when they were left with no money required for their work, but their subsistence derived mainly as courtesy of their enthusiasm. Journalists and other employees in this particular media house had to find work in other media houses (in order to secure their personal existence) and during their free time, they worked for eTrafika web site with an aim to ensure that this web site would continue with its work. It is important to emphasize that eTrafika founders had been offered to sell their web site six times so far, since its foundation. These offers came from various political parties and other legal entities, but the founders refused to sell this web site, regardless to the amount of money they had been offered.

Inability and incapacity of finding the person that would be in charge with this particular marketing field could be considered as the most important reason for poor and inadequate marketing position in the market. This person should eventually have been responsible for commercial clients as well. After two years of searching for this kind of person, the eTrafika founders realized that they had no more energy for this search and that the future of this web site cannot depend on commercial subjects and their dispositions. They finally decided to focus and dedicate their work to project writing and project implementations instead.

At present, project writing and project implementations represent their crucial income sources and this web site somehow managed to survive, due to grants they receive from Anti-Corruption Civic Organizations' Unified Network (AC-COUNT) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So far, key doantions came from USAID, American Embassy and SHL, while local institutions have never showed any interest for projects proposed by eTrafika teams.

Moja Hercegovina shares similar faith and destiny as eTrafika, because Moja Hercegovina also works as part of the same non – governmental organization (with the same name). Dragisa Sikimic, founder and chief – in – editor of Moja Hercegovina says that this media house, since it was established (and for almost six years), has been financed and funded primarily from project grants, making over 90% of the amount this web site disposes of.

“Optimal results indicate that 10% of incomes derive from commercial marketing sources and unless we benefited from personal friendship ties and lobbying, even this amount would have been impossible to attain. Namely, commercial marketing in BiH, apart from the fact that in over 90% of cases this field, has been, and still is conditioned and influenced by political lobbies, still represents small and undeveloped business field, so any further talks and hopes, that things in this specific field may improve in future, is simply a waste of time”, claimed Mr. Sikimic. He is skeptical and afraid, as far as sustainability and survival of his web site is concerned, because it is very difficult to presume with sustainable and continual financial incomes (coming through above mentioned grants), due to the fact that without these grants, this particular media house would most certainly face great difficulties and problems.

Apart from problems with getting financial grants, there is also a question of adequate implementation of projects, including the amount the donator allocates for honorary work for people involved in such projects.

“Today, apart from having difficulties with finding younger, or shall I say, more educated journalists, it is even more difficult to persuade them to stay with the media house, considering the fact that that their earnings may range somewhere between BAM 500.00 – BAM 600.00 per month.

Dragisa Sikimic, founder and chief – in – editor of Moja Hercegovina portal: “Commercial marketing in BiH, apart from the fact that in over 90% of cases this field, has been, and still is conditioned and influenced by political lobbies, still represents small and undeveloped business field. It is very difficult to presume with sustainable and continual financial incomes coming through the grants, due to the fact that without these grants, this particular media house would most certainly face great difficulties and problems”

Situation on the other hand, may be completely opposite to the above mentioned, because media houses may have incomes and make profit (required for their full work and operations), from commercial activities, reckons Ranko Petrusic, the owner and editor of Banjaluka.com, local web site form Banjaluka.

“During the period of past two years, the ratio between self – financing through the sales of banners on our web site on one hand, and project financing on the other hand, is 100% in favor of sales. I am not concerned about our future, because we had 10 growths for the period of last three years. I believe that it is necessary that all media houses should follow market demands and accordingly, develop and tailor their offers and strategy in conformance with market demands”

The situations where we are presented with an opportunity to apply for certain financial funds and grants with donators are more and more frequent, but, on the other hand, we have not enough qualified acquaintances required to implement these projects. I believe that this problem is increasing because we live in extremely corrupted, but also conservative society, and it is indeed hard to find and engage qualified persons willing to work as professional journalists under such conditions”, he added.

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This media house has been registered as limited liability company for commercial marketing activities and has (at the same time) been registered as civil association established to implement project activities, both as joint and connected legal entities.

“Having in mind the fact that readers will and desire to reach media contents is minimized; instead the contents often reach them, my opinion is that journalists should not act as mere contents creators only, but they must also be familiar with the tools and mechanism that would make the information available. This means that journalists must comprehend and fully understand the fundamentals of digital marketing and sales procedures, communications through social media sources, be familiar with readers’ habits, analytics etc”, he emphasized.

Additional incomes may also derive from Google commercial advertising, that is, derive from Ad Sense sources as well. Although these may appear naïve but they could serve as serious and reliable financial sources, regarding monthly incomes, if taken into serious consideration. For instance, the female author of this article (text) knows about the case of a young male person from BiH who owns tens of web sites and whose monthly earnings reach tens of thousands of Euros, just through Google commercial advertisements sources. However, behind this success, there is a well – developed system, including the entire team in charge with mountainous of tens of Face book pages and groups which he uses to advertise his own web sites. Journalists are simply limited with time and also limited with possibilities to dedicate their work to Google commercial advertising business, so they could only eventually hope that some readers might randomly click on some of them.

There are also Crowd-funding pages, such as Indiegogo, through which you could launch public invitation for money donations for particular purpose. For example, once you draft and plan for the project you wish to implement, provide explanation what exactly you need the money for and ask online users to help you out by donating one or more than one Euro. However, this principle is still not used properly in BiH, particularly by media houses.

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Fake news in non-regulated online media space

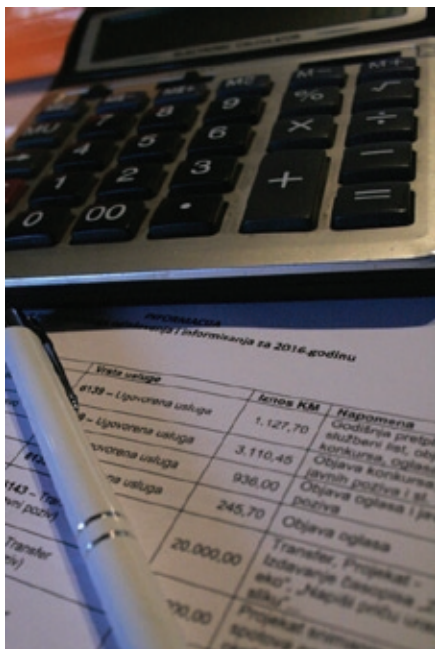
By: Vuk Vučetić

Introduction

False or fake news are not 21st Century product. They have always existed, not only in media intermediate communication, but also in everyday (human) communication. For instance, parents often, all for the best cause, use lies (existence of Bugaboo, Boogeyman eating little kids etc), so they could have easier control over their kids and raise them at the very early stage in their lives.

As far as media is concerned, the existence of so called “yellow or tabloid” type of journalism, emerging at the end of 19th Century, brought some kind of first forms and shapes of false (fake), over - exhausted and sensational types of news. Development of electronic media at the beginning of 20th Century also produced overflow of so called “black propaganda” (false news), particularly during the world war times. False news, in this sense, aimed to produce a political effect. Expansion of commercial television, in the second half of the 20th Century, created conditions ideal for spreading of grey propaganda, in terms





Strong expansion of “savage” internet web sites (internet web sites that do not have clear ownership details, including editing policies etc) has influenced the changes of characters of traditional journalism in general. Internet allowed common individuals to post contents without control and responsibility much faster, comparing to traditional media sources. In this sense, mass media seems to lose this race for exclusive news, considering that they cannot follow presenting and scope of social media and various alternative online web sites.

of commercial advertisement that selectively highlights affirmative and positive characteristics of certain product, with the purpose of better sales results. Finally, the internet development era emerged powerful “explosion” of large number of various online channels and platforms, through which false (fake) news could be shared and spread out very fast.

Therefore, the internet development created conditions for the flow of false (fake) news in the public space, because there are even more channels that can intercede this kind of contents, without anyone being legally responsible for their posting. The production of false (fake) news is mostly associated with so called “savage” internet web sites, although the trend of posting this kind of media contents is common to traditionally “registered” mass media houses; on the contrary. Reasons for the production and posting of false (fake) news mostly include political (there is opinion that false (fake) news ensured the victory of Donald Trump during the presidency campaign in the USA) and economical background (most common form of economically motivated false (fake) news include classical commercial advertisements and popular *click bait*)¹. Social media represents convenient conditions for spreading false (fake) news over internet.

Precisely speaking, we estimate that social media in fact represents the infrastructure for fabricating and making the influence of false news.

False internet web sites simply have much better influence and viewership when they share their contents over social media pages.

Strong expansion of “savage” internet web sites (internet web sites that do not have clear ownership details, including editing policies etc) has influenced the changes of characters of traditional journalism in general. Internet allowed common individuals to post contents without control and responsibility much faster, comparing to traditional media sources. In this sense, mass media seems to lose this race for exclusive news, considering that they cannot follow presenting and scope of social media and various alternative online web sites. In other words, the audience is no longer in position to receive most recent news from mass media sources, because the news has already reached some social and internet platform. In this sense, it seems that traditional mass media can no longer be considered as *gatekeeper*, that is, tight thoughts defining the news; instead, they are rather *gate-watchers* (Bruns Vs Howard: 2013:60) having the role to, to some extent, verify the contents which have through various channels, reached the public space. Often, traditional media without additional checking and with the purpose of having an exclusive taking the false news copied from “savage” and unreliable internet web sites. A book example for this was the case of certain Serbian satirical web site, namely News.net, where a drunken Serb allegedly killed a shark by diving in and falling on it and this accident apparently took place at Sharm el Shekih (Egypt) holiday resort. Without prior checking of the credibility of such information, journalists from traditional media in the entire region released this news, published the text, which even reached the New York Post.²

Fake news in BiH

In the context of BiH, it seems that false (fake) news have (through history) mostly been used for the purpose of acquiring personal interests of powerful political subjects. During former single – party system in BiH, propaganda was very frequent and was aimed to homogenize the entire population, create leader

1 Organization EAVI (The European Association for Viewers' Interests) recognizes ten most common forms of false (fake) news that can be found in media space (there are potential motifs listed in the bracket, that is, consequences for posting this kind of contents)

1. propaganda (politics/power)
2. clickbait (profit / entertainment)
3. sponzorised content (profit)
4. satire (humor and entertainment)
5. unintentional mistakes / falses (false informing)
6. upholding /advocating media (passion/ politics)
7. conspiracy theory (false informing /passion)
8. pseudo science (profit/politics)
9. disinformation (false informing)
10. Ifalse (fake) news (profit /politics), available at: <https://eavi.eu/beyond-fake-news-10-types-misleading-info/>

2 tekst “Srbi napravili patku od ajkule”, dostupan na: (Serbs made a duck out of a shark available at:) <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/814130/srbi-napravili-patku-od-ajkule.html>



personality cult and to sustain political and ideological *status quo*. Additionally, ever since the signing of Dayton Peace Agreement (1995), the entire BiH society was exposed to miscellaneous, politically and biased media contents, with all elements of propaganda, semi-information, misinformation etc. Media displays significant polygon for the promotion of certain politics, but also represents the weapon in political conflicts, used cunningly by local politicians for the period of past twenty years. Journalists' authenticity, objectivity, responsibility, professionalism and ethical values are mostly the victims of political disputes and

conflicts through media sources. Consequently, media and public space has already been contaminated with biased and non-objective media reports serving for propaganda aims by many political subjects. This is how in 2016, Dnevni Avaz (a local news paper) issued poll results where citizens unlimitedly showed their support for Fahrudin Radoncic, SBB political leader, who at the same time was the founder of and first owner of Dnevni Avaz, and among questioned persons, the photo of Ricky Gervais, British comedian and actor appeared (un) intentionally, along the name of Bosnian citizen, namely, Dževad Aličić, who had originally been interviewed. It was later released that the photos of other interviewed people of this poll were also false and copied from various internet web sites. Dnevni Avaz journalists released a public apology to all of their readers, including the interviewed people, because of rough, but yet unintentional and non-deliberate mistake³. Although the apology released by Dnevni Avaz officials was publically released, the question was whether the purpose of this poll was to manipulate the public releasing the false poll results and showing the great support Fahrudin Radoncic by the interviewed persons. Political disputes and conflicts, where traditional media sources (due to existential dependability from political power centers) served only as the weapon for conflict with political opponents, has transferred and moved to online field. Therefore, false (fake) news or news with elements of false information is already there, but with the development of internet and social media, they are cherishing and experiencing their advancement and progress.

“Savage” internet web sites and fake news in BiH

Internet web sites make significant segment of media system in BiH. It is the fact that traditional media sources are slowly losing their audience that mostly uses internet sources for receiving information through online media platforms. Therefore, the responsibility during the work of information – based internet websites should be on significantly higher level. There is a significant number of information – based internet web sites in BiH that operate or tend to operate in accordance with professional standards, complying with Press Code rules and online media guidelines in BiH. The following web sites should make this list and these include: “Klix”, “Buka”, “MojaHercegovina”, “Depo”, “Frontal”, “Slobodna Bosna” etc whose professional conduct, among other things, is reflected through the information on editing structure (impressum) as well as some information regarding the ownership structure.⁴

Still, it seems that the number of web sites that cannot be classified as professional and information – based and news web sites is greater than those mentioned above. There is a great number of “savage” internet web sites that appear overnight and out of nowhere in media field in BiH and these web sites do not comply with any types of codes in their work.

3 text: Ricky Gervais u Avazu postao Dževad i “podržao” Radončića, dostupno na: (Ricky Gervais becomes Dževad in Avaz And “supports” Radončić, available at: <http://hr.n1info.com/a110577/Svijet/Regija/Dnevni-avaz-objavio-niz-laznih-fotografija-u-anketi-u-kojoj-gradjani-podrzavaju-vlasnika-Radoncica.html>)

4 List of registered internet web sites in BiH available at: http://www.vzs.ba/index.php?option=com_wrapper&view=wrapper&Itemid=49

Internet web sites make significant segment of media system in BiH. It is the fact that traditional media sources are slowly losing their audience that mostly uses internet sources for receiving information through online media platforms. Therefore, the responsibility during the work of information – based internet websites should be on significantly higher level.

Generally speaking, we could say that BiH online media scene is mostly followed by great problems and issues, primarily those of non – transparency of media ownership and editing structures. Namely, the problem with the absence and lack of information, regarding the ownership structure is reflected in the fact that an individual, hidden from the public sights, may at the same time, own and possess more than one media house (which in fact obstruct the pluralism of opinions and stances) on one hand, and, on the other hand, this strengthens and reinforces the unilateralism in media reporting. Public must be provided with the information on ownership background, so they could identify and recognize the goals and intentions of certain media house.

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Besides, the absence and lack of transparency of ownership and editing structures allows the flow of so called “copy – paste” journalism, that is, simple taking over and posting the contents from other media sources, without any permission whatsoever. Taking into consideration that there are no information regarding contact details on the official web pages of these web sites, there is no responsibility for copied and taken contents either. Furthermore, these web sites may, not only to take and copy information – based and news from other media source, but also, they may serve as the polygon for posting of false (fake) and unchecked information that are motivated either economically or politically.

Although there are official information and evidence, we could all, at first sight, recognize and identify the great number of “savage” internet (informative) web sites (mostly of local character) in BiH serving the promotion of interests by particular political power centers, that is, disputes and conflicts with political opponents. Respectively, internet web sites display a modern form of former political party bulletins aimed to get cheap political points and to homogenize their potential election voters. For the promotion of such contents, political party activists are in charge and their job is to, using internet web sites and social media, and depending on the context, praise or to criticize the activities of political subjects who serve as key protagonists of particular media contents.

Apart from motivated misinformation or false (fake) news, in the context of online web sites in BiH, it seems that clickbait contents are rather represented and present in BiH internet market as their goal is to aim for the profit and entertainment. This specific form of media contents has simply flooded the internet and social media. Clickbait works according to tabloid – based rules, including sensational and so called yellow type journalism. The point is that sensational topics (such as: “You won’t believe what happened”) draw attention and “bait” readers (viewers) so they could click on these topics. The content of these texts is absolutely opposite to what it originally stands for, but this is irrelevant, considering that their primary goal is to make profit, rather than authenticity.

Namely, after every single click or open link, certain profit is obtained which is furthermore multiplied with enormous number of views, clicks etc. Apart from this, these contents spread throughout social media very fast and like a plague, they become viral as well. The danger is that viral occurrence has become most important value, where other criteria, such as accuracy and authenticity, remains marginalized. Today, the number of shares and likes mark and define the “quality” contents, which is why most internet web sites compete for largest possible reach. In this sense, the emerging of clickbaits contents is actually part of wider wave of tabloid – based journalists’ and social values.

Apart from profit context, false (fake) news may be considered as the product of simple entertainment of “digital savages” who by posting certain wrapped and manipulative video clips or photo shop false photos, prove their “superiority” in relation with “analogue” and insufficiently “(IT) literate” old – aged audience. One of these benign samples of photo shop made photo was the bear



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that was walking through the center of the town of Pale on 1 April 2015.

Considering that it was 1 April, this joke caused panic of local population. However, on the other hand, there were cases of even greater amount of irresponsibility and immaturity. Apparently, during the great river floods, which happened and emerged in 2014 in BiH, the photo containing dead bodies floating in Drina River also appeared on the internet. Drina River flooded during this particular period, just as many other rivers in BiH. This kind of fake (false) news, apart from misinforming the general public, also caused great panic and fear.

The problem is that there is no specific legislative that would disable or even obstruct the growing number of “savage” web sites. Press Council of BiH is the institution monitoring online media sources in BiH, but considering that this is also a self-regulatory body, it has no legal capacity to impose sanctions or fines by any means. Potential solution should include the passing of more appropriate and stricter legislative, but also the establishing of registry of all online media web sites in order to increase transparency and additionally, to create the conditions for more professional work of these media houses.

Raskirnkavanje.ba, a new local web site recently began with its work and its intention is the disclosure of various forms of false (fake) news including: misinforming, fake news, biased reporting, fact manipulation etc, that are posted on BiH internet web sites and that are available to BiH general public. This web site represents refreshment in foggy online media space in BiH. Highlighting (un) intentional errors, online media attempt to raise awareness on false (fake) news as negative occurrence that many individuals are still unaware of.

Conclusion: Media literacy as the key in the fight against false (fake) news

All in all, the existence of false (fake) news, in its widest sense, represents the danger for functioning of democracy. The public, loaded with different contents of manipulative and propaganda – based character on daily basis, cannot reach the state of “critical maturity”, which again, is required and necessary for better comprehension and understanding of this issue, including critical valorization of social and political affairs.

One of the most fundamental problems is the fact that general public is (in the context of media issues) not sufficiently literate and usually does not question the authenticity of contents they consume. The need for media literacy is getting more significant in the era of the development of different online channels of communication and media platforms, which, among other things, means greater space for the occurrence of misuses and spreading and sharing of false (fake) and manipulative contents. As far as this issue is concerned, the public does need to acknowledge in order to help themselves understand the difference between quality based from poor quality contents, and to check the source and authenticity of media contents regarding the aims and goals of posting of media contents. Taking into consideration the vast significance of media, the questioning of media contents, particularly the occurrence of potentially false (fake) news, should become a part of “personal hygiene” of every single citizen in this “global village”.

Apart from this, the wave of false (fake) news disables and disallows the public debate based on the force of arguments and facts. Life in the era of post – truth additionally makes this particular situation even more difficult. The core (post – truth) is that the facts no longer represent and display significant role in the context of social relevancy of information. People rather rely on their own emotions while making judgments and conclusions, instead of relying on facts and arguments. In this context, it seems that BiH public believes our politicians and that their beliefs are based on pure emotions, instead of facing raw reality they are surrounded with and facing the environment they live in. Therefore, we could say that false (fake) news represent some sort of fuel for post – truth.

Citizens indeed need reliable, correct and authentic information in order to have better positioning and to make political and quality decisions. In the time where false (fake) news dominate, that is, in times where misinforming is divided into “ours” and “theirs”, the space for healthy discussion is simply disabled and unavailable. The society is in the situation where all sides and parties in public sphere consider themselves right, that is, in the situation where there are no objective measurements of argument power. On the contrary, it seems that the powerful arguments, disputes, arguing, insults, offends, hate speech and disrespect dominate in public space and are firmly supported by the emerging



wave of tabloid – based and spectacular reality, in which the society of 21st century lives.

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Media ownership transparency and journalists' rights

By: Brankica Smiljanić

The situation in media field in BiH has actually never been on a satisfactory level, as it cannot be considered satisfactory at present either, starting with journalists' rights to media ownership transparency. Many questions raised still are still to be answered, which in general outlines the poor review of media and freedom which in this field does not exist in reality. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) presented the 2018 press freedom barometer and Bosnia was on the 62nd place according to the index of media liberties / freedoms. However, journalists are still deprived of rights, they have to work without legal contracts, and they are often threatened and have no access to information pursuant to legal and existing legal provisions.

Law on media ownership transparency could contribute in an improvement of working, social and professional status of journalists. Milan Kovac, BN Radio and TV house (local TV and Radio station) journalist, who works at the informative and news desk, reckons that this legal provision “would not immediately initiate, but it would eventually instigate the settling of chaotic situation in media field in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would, looking from long-term perspective result in better and improved status of journalists and media staff in general”.

The fact is that ever-growing number of local web sites is increasing and that the audience is not even familiar with professional organization, functioning, ethic codes and professional standards of journalists' reports. Dragana Trninic, Head of Department of Journalism and Communication Studies with the Faculty of Political Studies in Banjaluka, claims that “the audience is always eager to discover and find out new information and new contents that they find interesting and very few people pay attention to impressum of web site through which they receive information and the source they use to get certain information. This is a consequence of general media illiteracy. Audience considered as media literate group shall not lose trust in media that have their impressum, because some other media houses do not have it posted on their web site pages; instead this will represent one of the most important criteria for them in choosing media house they prefer. The occurrence of media web sites without impressum can be changed through media regulation and media literacy assessment for audience that would eventually, by the gradual development competencies, avoid this kind of media houses”.

Furthermore, the practice of copying and sharing the contents from certain web

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sites; web sites without impressum results in the emerging of false and incorrect information.

Andrijana Pisarevic, SrpskaCafe.com editor and vice – president of Media Union (Syndicate) and Graphic Artists of RS emphasized: "We have seen such case recently on RTRS. RTRS shared biased information from particular web site (also without impressum) claiming that British and American Services intensify their work with the purpose of destabilizing the official government in the Republic of Srpska. These kinds of cases do not emerge accidentally; they rather appear intentionally and deliberately. Therefore, if someone working for the Public RTV Broadcasting Service is doing this, what or who can stop the others to do the same thing and follow the same path? The principle includes the following: present a web site without impressum and it will serve to mislay the traces. You could afterwards post unchecked information without author's signature, statements or verifying.

Additionally, you should "share" same information on your web site referring to the "source", even though the responsible people for posting such information, regardless whether they are true or false information actually do not exist in reality".

Media illiterate audience, do not only fail to pay attention to impressum (with many of them not even knowing the meaning of this word), but they also do not pay attention to the author of the text/article they view or read. Brankica Spasenica, a female journalist believes that the audience is mostly focused on the content itself.

"Our public is still mostly biased towards old – fashioned and traditional media sources.

In this sense, they sometimes "bound or tie" with particular TV figure, so therefore, they believe to everything that this figure states and says in public, rather than relying on other sources.

As far as texts and articles are concerned, I doubt that concrete full name beneath the text / article they view or read, means anything to them", said Spasenica.

Approximate information, regarding the number of journalists that are deprived of legal rights by their employers (as far as legal and obligatory duties are concerned) shall remain unknown. We also do not know whether media houses work and operate according to legal law provisions, whether they pay contributions, what the number of journalists working illegally is in reality and other associated facts. Legal inspection officials should take care about these issues, so journalists could; as a result, perform their professional work in much better and more appropriate way.

Impressum

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