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Gjylie Rexha

University for Business and Technology, gjylie.rexha@ubt-uni.net

Anisa Rada

University for Business and Technology, anisa.rada@ubt-uni.net

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Radio in Kosovo: Missed Communication during its Transformation into a Multi-platform Media

Gjylie Rexha, Anisa Rada

UBT – Higher Education Institution, Lagjja Kalabria, 10000 p.n.,
Pristina, Kosovo

Abstract. Radio continues to be empowered by its characteristic values as dynamic media and easily adapted to new technologies of 21 century. But, in Kosovo, radio is losing its audiences and impact it had in previous decades. Through the questionnaire based research, we examine the reasons why audiences are losing their interest for radio and offer the alternative solutions for reinstatement of radio power in the era of multi-platform media. This paper argues that radio in Kosovo is losing its audiences because it is not producing qualitative content and is not and is not transforming itself in multi-platform media which uses web to reach fragmented audiences.

Keywords: multi-platform radio, Kosovo, radio content, podcast, web audiences

Introduction

Radio remains an important element of the media ecology in the first decades of the 21st century combining key traditional characteristics and additional capacities enabled by the new technology and Internet platforms. The Age of Internet represents both for the radio and the other mass media of the previous century, “a profound shift-and a return” (Standage, 2013), which intertwines the values of good journalism and personalized communication with the opportunities generated by the process of transformation of media companies during the period known as the “network society” (Couldry, 2012). As scholars argue, “radio reappears as a vibrant, complex field of mediation whose durability and social power are inextricable from its technological plasticity, sensorial particularity, and always emergent” (Bessire, Fisher 2013). New technologies and opportunities created by the Internet aid the radio to a smooth next transformation: its development into a multi-platform media, adding to its communication channels with the audiences. Radio stations continue to “segment the audience” (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, Budini, Gjergji, 2015), as they used to in the previous century thus remaining a medium that targets the individual to whom it offers content bearing the features of information that is special, relaxing or associative at times, while at other times it appears to be a medium that engenders content through the active participation of citizens.

The Internet has offered the radio an opportunity to fulfil the key expectation of the mobile audiences, even more dynamic through the web, nonetheless without harming the consolidated trust of the “classic” audiences from the age of frequencies. *Podcasts* have transformed the radio from a medium with content that is received in one hearing session into a medium with content that is available to the people whenever they seek it. At the same time, special studies argue that “newer technologies have had only a modest impact on the way people interact with talk radio” (Berry, Sobieraj, 2011). Thus, the radio still keeps its featured acquired in the 1930s as a „hard“ news channel (Allan, 2010), whereas the new channels add to its capacity to broadcast content.

In Kosovo, where for 6 decades the radio was the most important medium bearing the power a cultural institution, its role is waning. In the era of frequencies, the radio was the medium that wormed into the broad masses of the population through its content and based on the growth of transmitters. In 1940 – 1990 “Radio Prishtina” developed as a powerful institution, marking the era of the birth and growth of Albanian language media in the province of Kosovo, then part of the Yugoslav Federation. Until 1963, the program of Radio Prishtina was broadcast by a 20 KW transmitter made by Thomson, France, while in 1981, Radio Prishtina assembled and activated the transmitting station in AM (medium waves) in the frequency of 1413KHz with 1000 KW power. The equipment was made by BBC (Brown Boweri Company) from Switzerland. This transmitter was one of the 13 most powerful transmitters in Europe. Until 1999 (the period of war in Kosovo) Radio Prishtina used the power of the transmitter and AM waves managing the transmitting network of six local radio stations in the main cities of Kosovo (Kadriu, A, 2019). The growth and development of this cultural and media organization was discontinued in the

beginning of the 90s when the regime of Slobodan Milošević disestablished the autonomy of Kosovo. In the first post-war years (1999), radio went through its rebirth albeit within a media system that was different from that of one decade ago. Old and new stations populated the media landscape with a new model: private and public media, compared to the state-owned media of the past, within a media environment and system that started using new technology and new audiences of a higher level. Five years after the war (2004), in Kosovo there were 89 radio stations (Berisha, 2004), making the radio the main medium based on numbers, compared to newspapers or TV stations. It represented an important medium providing information and competing with newspapers and TV stations thanks to the advantages by its frequencies. In the later years, radio faced with the need to develop Internet-based journalism and with the competition from the new media that were developing as online media only. In 2019 there were 86 radio stations (IMC, 2019) in Kosovo. Nevertheless, despite a large number in a market with fewer than 1.8 million inhabitants for the first time in the history of its development, the radio in Kosovo is becoming an unimportant medium. This research argues that audiences are leaving the radio and the interest in the radio is lower compared to the previous years.

Krahasuar me vitet e kaluara, interesimi juaj për radion:

291 responses

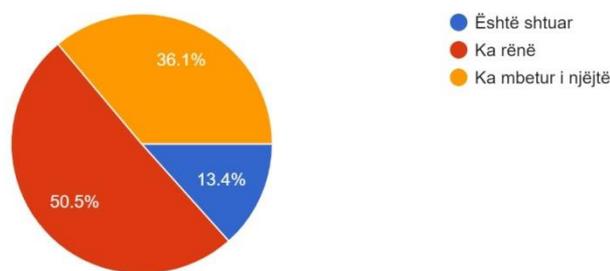


Figure 1: Compared to the previous years the interest in the radio has: fallen, increased, remained the same

(50.5 Percent of respondents say the interest has fallen, 36.1Percent of respondents say the interest has remained the same, and 13.4Percent of respondents say the interest has increased). From the research findings it results that the decrease of interest expands across several levels:

from the assessment of the primary function of the radio as fast news medium to the perception about it as necessary even in the times of the web, notwithstanding the content that is not reaching to the audience, as is elaborated in the findings part of this paper.

Research question:

Does the incompatibility of content broadcast platforms and technologies affect the loss of interest in the radio on the part of Kosovo audiences?

Hypothesis: The radio in Kosovo is not producing interesting content for the audiences and is not following the process of the transformation of mass audiences into segmented audiences that consume content in parallel across frequencies and new Internet-based platforms.

Methodology

This paper requires answers to the reasons why the interest of the audiences in the radio in Kosovo has decreased. This is a questionnaire-based research, and the database is used for qualitative analysis. The questionnaire comprises of questions grouped in three categories: knowing the listeners/audiences of the radios that broadcast in frequencies known as the “classic” platform of conveying content, the communication of the radio with the audiences during the transformation process into a multi-platform media and the requirements of the audiences on Internet for radio programs.

In the content aspect, the questionnaire contains a list of combined questions. Depending on their content, the first category of questions are closed ones, the second comprises multiple choice questions, and in some of them the respondents are asked to justify the alternative they select. The respondents were given the opportunity to select individually the questions they respond to. This option enabled ensuring data on their level of knowledge on the respective questions, while during the data processing the absence of answers in certain cases has been interpreted as lack of knowledge on the object of the question.

The method used to determine the sample is the probability one, through which “there is better chance for the sample to be representative” (Balle, 2011). At the first stage of data collection, the questionnaire was distributed online using a chain-like method starting with closest contact and expanding through the sharing system to the contacts of the contacts, both individual and group ones, across social networks, primarily the Facebook. Due to our engagement as academic staff for the Faculty of Media and Communication we are able to ensure the first groups of respondents from among the circle of students and then expand the list of respondents to other groups through the social network. This method of dissemination has ensured age, professional and gender inclusion. In Kosovo, various age groups have access to the Internet (KSA, 2018) and this is a precondition to ensuring the representative sample. Since the research focuses on the radio that are part of the media system in Kosovo, in the geographic aspect the selecting criterion was that the respondents are consumers of the media within the territory of the Republic of Kosovo. Determination of such criteria and online data collection helped focus the analysis on the assessment of the audiences in engaging the radios in the process of adapting content to the new broadcast platforms and technologies and reaching to the listeners even through such platforms. The research focused on dealing with this factor in the reporting of the radios with the audiences and does deal with other factors, e.g. economic, socio-cultural etc., that may influence the process of communication between the radio station and their audiences.

In the aspect of nationality, the research focuses only on the Albanian audiences as the majority population in Kosovo. According to the last census in 2011, citizens whose mother tongue is Albanian comprise of some 92 percent of the overall population of 1.739.825 inhabitants in Kosovo (KSA, 2011).

Findings

Radio as a name not as a frequency

Although for decades on end the radio used to be among the main media in Kosovo it did not succeed in transforming for the mass audiences into a wanted media based on the knowledge of its frequencies. Responding to questions to name a radio station at the national level and local level, the number of respondents begins a gradual fall compared to their overall number. In terms of their knowledge of radio stations with national and local frequencies, the number falls to 265 for radios with national frequencies and to 252 for radios with local frequencies compared to the overall number of respondents (303). The specific element in this case is that even those who respond make mistakes while categorizing the radio stations with national and local frequencies. Presenting the shape of the “inverted pyramid”, the overall knowledge of the names of radio stations begins a decline in the responses on knowing their frequencies. The number of respondents answering that they know the frequencies to some radio station in Kosovo is halved compared to the overall number of respondents (52.6 percent of the respondents), however, such knowledge is further reduced when they are asked to state the frequencies. A total of 152 respondents answered to this question but about half of them have given inaccurate answers either when writing the name of the radio station, or when writing both elements and giving an answer according to which the written frequency does not correspond with the name of the radio station. Knowledge is limited even in cases of the main radios that have been around for a long time in the media market in Kosovo. The superficial knowledge of the frequency may be considered a technical element but it is the key element to identifying a radio station in the era of frequencies. Knowing it, and searching for a radio station through its frequency manifests the level of communication and the mass of its loyal listeners/audience that seeks for a special radio and not just a radio as a casual medium. Such lack of knowledge is an indicator that the listeners are uninformed about the radio and proves that the majority of the radio stations have failed to establish close relationships with the audiences based on the mutual recognition with their listeners. Failure to know the frequencies is a characteristic of audiences of all ages but it is more noticeable among the audience aged under 30. Thus, the radio in Kosovo has failed to traditionally attract the audiences based on the recognition of its basic “ID”. This shortcoming was not noticed too much in the past as the number of radio stations was lower and the chance of coming across them by chance was bigger but in a market restricted in its past, finding the radio station was easier.

Radio-A Medium Absent in the Internet

Kosovo is a small media market but in the last decade it has become saturated with new media and its characteristic is the transition from the traditional mass media into the new Internet-based platforms. The diffusion of internet has given rise to a new category of migrating audiences and new ways of consuming media. Most mass media have followed along with this trend by adapting their platforms of disseminating content and transforming into new media, whereas others were created as portals. In the meantime, the radio is still in its nascent stages regarding the process of adapting to the requests of the net-audiences. The level of knowledge of internet

radio programs is superficial and the content offer does not meet the expectations or needs of the audiences.

A jeni në dijeni për radio që transmetojnë programe në ueb (online)?

291 responses

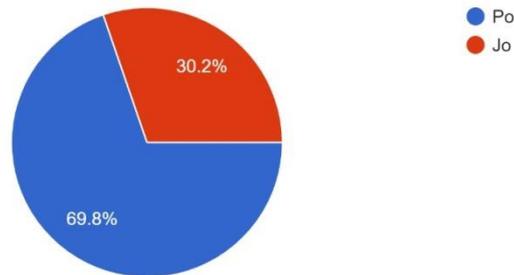


Figure 2: Are you aware of radio stations that broadcast programs on the web?

A e dini adresën e ndonjë radioje në faqet e tyre në internet?

287 responses

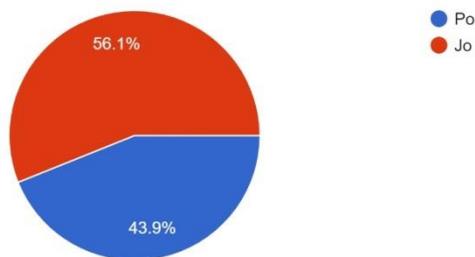


Figure 3: Do you know the address of some radios stations pages on the internet?

69.8 percent know there are radio stations broadcasting on the web but 43.9 percent say they know the address of radio stations broadcasting on the web. However, the accuracy of the responses within the percentage of those responding they know the addresses of internet radio station is mainly limited to knowing the name of the radio station. At the time when searching for a particular medium is only one Google search away, not knowing the full address as the “passport” of the radio station is not the key element to finding, keeping and reaching out increasingly mobile audiences. An encouraging element is the fact that this category of audiences, even when they do not know the exact address, is able to identify the radio station. The small number of radio stations that are known either as multiplatform media or only as web radios is discouraging. Of 86 radio stations in Kosovo, most respondents to these questions highlight the two main radio stations (Radio Dukagjini and Radio Kosova), whereas the rest give scattered answers on some new radios and in which frequencies they broadcast at the local level. Failure to know and the lack of programmatic offer on the Internet is reflected in the concentration of the audiences on a small number of radio stations, which, although partially only, follow the trend of moving their audiences from the frequencies to the web. With the

continuation of this trend, audiences segmented on the web shall focus on a limited number of radio stations thus creating a reality comparable to the one of the frequency period but caused by different factors. In the past, the concentration of mass audiences depended on the program and coverage by frequencies; in the age of Internet this orientation is directly linked with the process of transformation of the radio into a multiplatform medium. Using the opportunities provided by the internet to promote and broadcast programs as podcasts, or adapting them to text, photo and video formats would open new alternatives to develop the radio stations and construct new forms of communication with the audiences. More than half of the respondents (58.1 percent) say that in the social networks they use they do not find any information on the programs of the radios, but they see these networks as a way to attract them to follow the respective programs (66.8 percent).

A gjeni njoftime dhe paralajmërime për programet e radiove nëpër rrjetet sociale?

289 responses

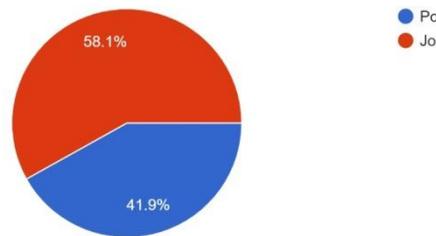


Figure 4: Do you find information or notices about radio programs on social networks?

Nëse po, a u tërheqin ato për t'i ndjekur programet përkatëse?

215 responses

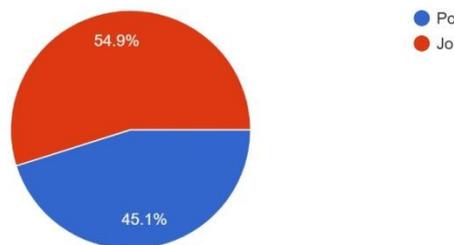


Figure 5: If not, would you consider that an attractive way to follow the respective programs? Failure to adapt the promotion of programs over the social network reduces and restricts the necessary process of mutual communication between the radio station and the audiences grouped in these networks. The uninformed audiences are lost audiences, which move towards other media where they find the content they are seeking.

Content in infobesity

Audiences seek content even in the period of “next journalism” (Kovach, Rosenstiel, 2010). To the questions concerning the program preferences, respondents say they look for quality content that becomes an influencing element on the formats where they would consume such content. The results of this research indicate that “the migration of audiences” towards new media is not the key factor in the decrease of interest on the radio in Kosovo. The key reason is related to the inability of most radio stations to adapt to the fast pace that the audiences have jumped from the traditional ways of consuming the media and the increased requirement for quality information at the time of “infobesity” (Scherer, 2011). In Kosovo, 30 percent still consider the radio as a medium through which they get information and appreciate its features as a quick and responding medium, while 42.9 percent listen to entertainment programs.

A paraqet radio media prej të cilës informoheni?

283 responses

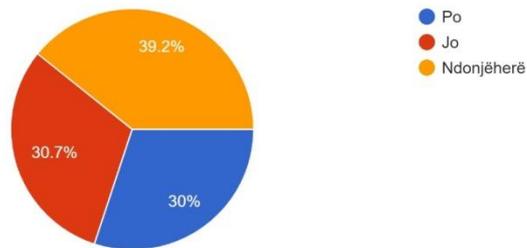


Figure 6: Is the radio a medium through which you get informed?

A dëgjoni ndonjë program argëtues të radios?

287 responses

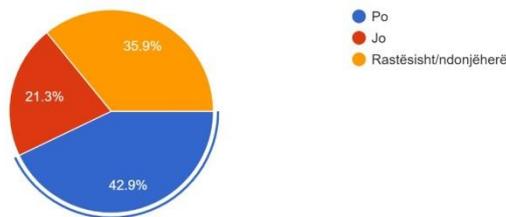


Figure 7: Do you listen to any entertainment programs on the radio?

The main programs that the radio is identified with in Kosovo are the entertaining ones, especially the ones where the listener has an opportunity to communicate directly with the radio station. On the other hand, those who consider the radio as a medium from which they get informed, represent the category of the listeners who identify the radio as a medium that is

traditionally known for its reaction and fast news. Therefore, the well-consolidated values that make the radio a medium that is discernible from the others in the past remain its key attributes even in the age of the Internet. The other important category of responses to these questions are the high percentages in the option “by chance/sometimes”. They relate to the typical characteristics of the radio as a medium that broadcasted content which was easily absorbed and a medium that found and created communication with the inattentive listener. In the age of the Internet, this category may be found and attracted by the radio if they are offered the content they are seeking and in formats they use, because the radio possesses the key element which meets the need of citizens/audiences. The respondents do not fall into the “trap” to sway their attention from quality because of technological facilities. To the question whether they would listen to the radio programs if they found them recorded on the Internet, the majority (58.1 percent) condition the ease of the podcast with the content to be provided.

A do të dëgjonit programe radiofonike nëse do t'i gjenit të incizuara në internet?

289 responses

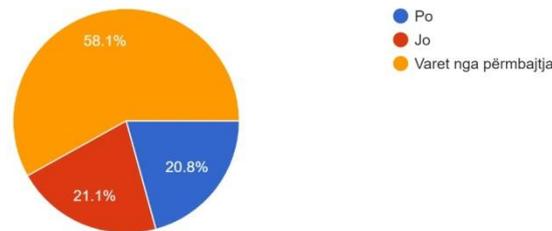


Figure 8: Would you listen to radio programs if you found them recorded on the Internet?

The high percentage of respondents who selected the option “depends on the content” is an indicator that may serve the radio stations with their process of reconciling the basic requirement of the citizens: a quality media product. The audience succeeds in identifying the lack of quality content in an overpopulated market with various categories of media, and keep seeking quality from the media it recognizes for their values and professional principles. In their responses, the respondents determine clearly the fields and categories of the characteristic programs for the mass media, including the radio, through which good journalism is carried out and which makes a difference with its quality, even at the times of infobesity.

Çfarë përmbajtjeje do t'u bënte që të ndiqnit më shumë radio? (Rrumbullakoderi në 3 opsione):

286 responses

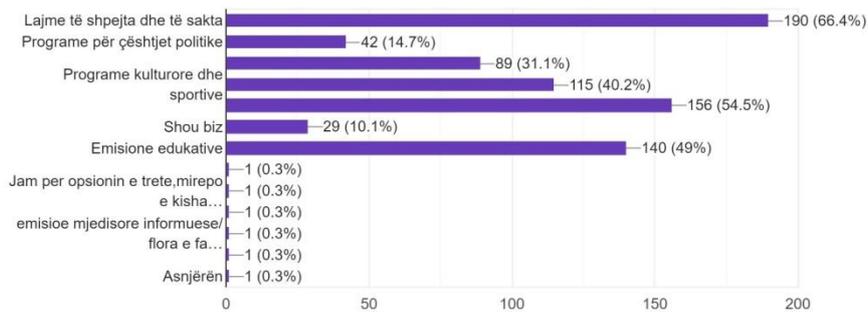


Figure 9: What content would make you listen to the radio more? (Select up to 3 options)

The audience of the radio remains “conservatory” with its requirements for the content of radio programs even at the age of new media and advanced technology. By selecting three priority radio program categories developed throughout its history (fast and accurate news 66.4 percent, music and entertaining contact programs 54.5 percent and educational programs 49 percent), the audiences prove that the radio still is perceived as a medium that is identified through its quality content but the radio stations nowadays fail to satisfy this expectation.

Si e vlerësoni radion në Kosovë? (rrumbullakoni njërin version):

278 responses

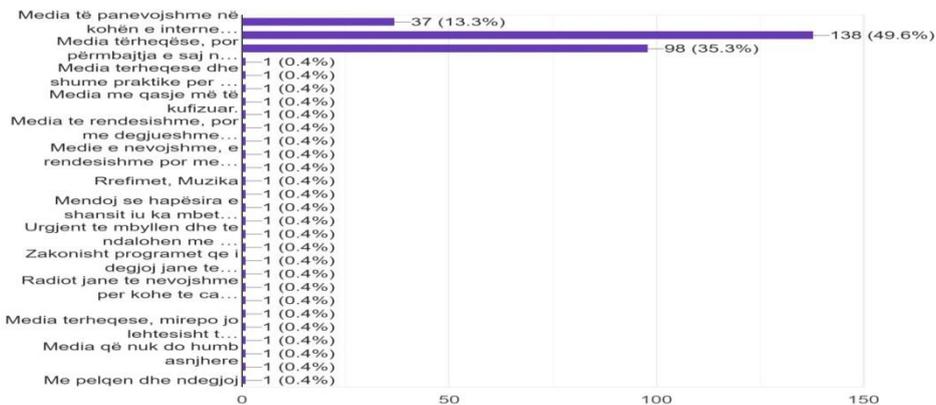


Table 10: How do you assess the radio in Kosovo?

49.6 percent of the respondents see the radio in Kosovo as an important medium, albeit with poor content, some 35.3 percent as an attractive medium, but with content that fails to reach to them

and the option with the least percentage is the one on the radio as an unnecessary medium at the age of the Internet 13.3 percent).

Frequencies and net too

The expansion of web broadcasting serves the radio to reach the highest levels of penetration to and communication with the audiences. However, the development of the radio in the new Internet-based platforms is not its end as a media that is discernible by its frequencies. Both complement each-other and provide the radio with opportunities it never had before in its history. The frequencies will continue to serve to penetrate to mobile audiences and in extraordinary cases when it may remain the only media on the air, as has happened at extraordinary situations in various countries (BBC, 2015); whereas the web provides an opportunity to expand the ways of promoting the program and disseminating the content in various formats. In Kosovo, the radio still is appreciated for its role as a medium for the mobile audiences. The absolute majority of the respondents listen to the radio while in their cars, distinguishing it for its unique capacity as a medium that is received only through listening. But only the travelers cannot be a sufficient audience for the radio after other mass audiences were lost, for whom the radio was an alternative medium in family and social environments. At the age of the new media, the other categories of the audiences are reached out to through a combination of two elements: good content and increasing the number of channels, beyond the mere frequencies, to disseminate it.

A i dëgjoni si programe në radio, apo i gjeni në internet këto programe?

285 responses

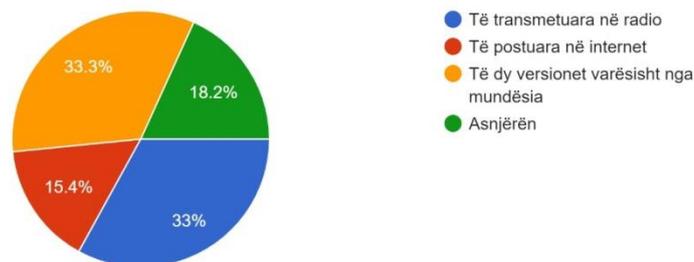


Figure 10: Do you listen to the programs on the radio or do you find them on the Internet?

The audiences are now dispersed throughout the frequencies and web formats. As dispersed, the percentage of listeners in the frequencies is still higher (33 percent) than on the Internet (15.4 percent), but 33.3 percent use both ways simultaneously depending on the case and this indicates the direction which the various categories of potential listeners are heading to. However, a broader use of new opportunities brought by the Internet is only valuable when it develops parallel with good journalism. The respondents in Kosovo say they would follow the radio if, first of all, the radio stations would bring the topics they are interested in (78.3 percent), then to be better informed about the programs (39.1 percent), while they prefer the

programs in both possible versions in the Internet: as audio and text, but linked with the content as a determining element to be either accepted or rejected by them.

A do të dëgjonit programe radiofonike nëse do t'i gjenit të incizuara në internet?

289 responses

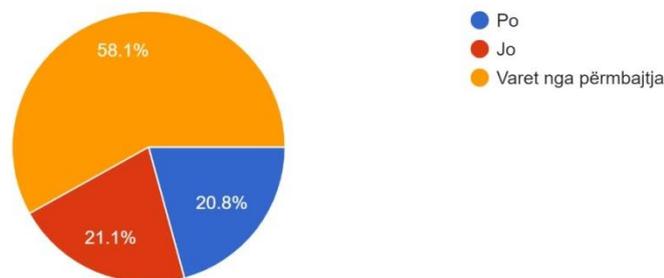


Figure 11: Would you listen to radio programs if you would find them recorded on the Internet?

A do të lexonit materiale të përgatitura nga radio sikur ato t'u ofroreshin online në formën e teksteve apo videove?

289 responses

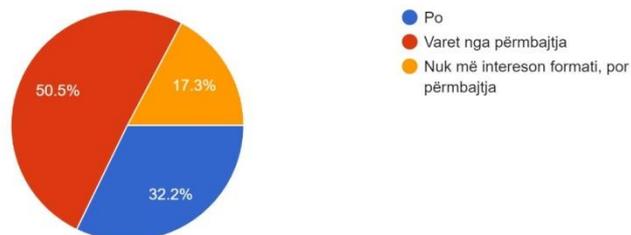


Figure 12: Would you read the materials prepared by the radio station if they were offered online as text or video?

With this orientation of the audiences, the radio stations in Kosovo would be able to follow the practice of the radio stations in developed countries, or of the international ones that broadcast for the Albanian audiences, which have transformed and advanced the manner of broadcasting of their content harnessing the opportunities provided by the Internet. In the case of the radio stations in Kosovo, the practice of broadcasting the content as podcast, the direct broadcast parallel over the frequencies and over the web, the promotion of programs through the social networks or other forms of adapting the broadcast material into text format are still limited. From the answers of the respondents to this questionnaire it is established that the most well-known

programs are the ones that contain several features simultaneously: they are more qualitative in the content aspect, are promoted over the radio frequencies and on the Internet, they provide an opportunity to communicate with the listeners parallel via phone calls and social networks, and can be found in any of the abovementioned formats: podcast and text, apart from being broadcasted over the frequencies. When asked to name specific programs, the respondents highlight programs such as: news, in the case of some radio stations also special entertaining programs that offer the audiences an opportunity to communicate with the program in any of the way mentioned above.

Audiences Focused on the Kosovo Radio

The Albanian audiences in Kosovo lean towards radio station that are media of Kosovo and not towards the radio stations of other countries, regardless of the fact that they broadcast in Albanian language. Asked whether they listen to other radio stations in Albanian language but are not from Kosovo, more than half (53.4 percent responded by no, 23.8 percent responded by yes and 22.8 percent responded by occasionally/sometimes.

A dëgjoni ndonjëherë radio që transmeton në shqip, por që nuk është radiostacion nga Kosova?

290 responses

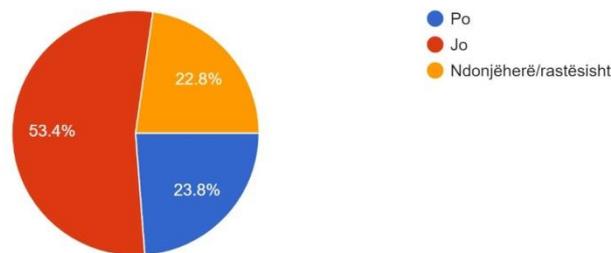


Figure 13: Do you ever listen to the radio that broadcasts in Albanian language but is not a radio station from Kosovo?

To the following question that aims to name radio stations of this category, the number of respondents that answered declines (only 114 of them responded), but even among these respondents the level of accuracy is low as the majority again mention radio stations at the Kosovo level. Among other radio stations that have an audience are the foreign ones which have or have had throughout the years programs in the Albanian language (Radio Free Europe, VOA, Deutsche Welle etc), and radio stations from Albania (Radio Tirana, Top Albania Radio etc). This indicates that radio stations in the Albanian language in Kosovo have sufficient space to build their audiences within Kosovo, and they do not compete with other radios, although the new platforms offer an opportunity to all radio stations to compete with one another despite geographical borders and the restrictions stemming from there due to broadcasting over frequencies.

Nevertheless, such classification of radio stations does not constitute one of the key goals of this research. Rather, it serves to identify one of the potential spaces for the development of radio stations in Kosovo. Having audiences that are based on and link their expectations with the Kosovo radio stations, it is easier for the latter to advance communication with the community and to expand the local audiences. As a responsive and penetrating medium, the radio has the capacity to transform local events into content that is returned to the audience as a public service.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The radio in Kosovo is at a transition period; from a medium that used to communicate with the listeners only through the frequencies into a multimedia that will seek audiences dispersed over the net and new Internet-based platforms. The interest on the radio and its traditional form has declined compared to the period when the radio was one of the three mass media, important and influential in the media landscape.

This research argues that the reasons why the influence and importance of the radio has declined stem from the failure of the radio stations to adapt to the new trends and demands of the audiences of the 21st century that are oriented towards the new media. The radio stations in Kosovo failed to follow suit and to adapt to the new approach of the audiences in consuming the media. They do not use the opportunities provided by the social networks and other web-based platforms as channels that aid in informing the audiences and reaching out to them. Nonetheless, the research also argues that only reaching out to the web audiences would not be sufficient to build communication and to bring back their interest in the radio.

The key element that would impact building communication and increasing the interest in the radio is the content of its programs. Multiplying channels to disseminate content is, in itself, conditioned by the content. Audiences highlight this element emphasizing it as their key demand towards the radio stations in Kosovo. They connect with the content, and depending on its quality, would create the absent connection with the radio.

Audiences expect from the radio to implement the categories of “classic” programs of the radio for the previous century: fast information, entertaining and educational programs. Such expectations of the radio stations testify that the key pillars for the development of the radio even in the Internet age are found in the strengthening of the historically well-consolidated values that made the radio a medium discernible from the others, in the past. The audiences do not condition the satisfying of these expectations only with the adaption of the radio for the web. In fact, they demand the application of several alternatives simultaneously: broadcasting on both frequencies and the Internet as podcasts or text format. Such expectations indicate that the period of radio as a mass medium to build personalized communication and segmentation of audiences over the frequencies is not over in Kosovo yet, but the unharnessed opportunities given by the Internet reduce the influence of the radio and limit the communication it establishes with the audiences. The radio is still appreciated for its unique capacity to communicate with mobile audiences who lack the ability to use other media. Therefore, further development of programs broadcast over the frequencies is more than necessary for the traditional radio stations and a needed alternative for the new radio stations.

While this research concludes that the missing communication in the mass of communication channels affects the loss of position of this important medium, the key recommendation resulting from the research is that radio stations in Kosovo should use the expanded opportunities by the Internet to build personalized communication with increasingly segmented audiences. Seeking the listeners of frequencies of those past times on across several platforms simultaneously, the

radio would succeed in bringing them back and in penetrating to new audiences that are found dispersed across the Internet.

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