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# NEW MEDIA IN SERBIA: A REALM OF FREEDOM OR A PANDORA'S BOX?



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## South-East European Partnership for Media Development

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# NEW MEDIA IN SERBIA: A REALM OF FREEDOM OR A PANDORA'S BOX?

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## INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the use of social networks, modern and technologically advanced means of communication in developing countries such as Serbia, is a real challenge. It should always be kept in mind that there are two groups of users who use social networks differently, which has different effects on them. One group instrumentalizes social networks, while another group is often instrumentalized, as a subject of manipulation.

Most users do not find the privacy policy important, which is closely related to the low level of media literacy in Serbia. Media illiterate audience is also a reason large amounts of false news are being published, reality-show information, tabloid comments and similar, to the benefit of those who want to limit critical thinking.

However, social networks in Serbia, compared to traditional, are an oasis of free speech and the place for expressing opinions. There is a growing number of users; a presence of traditional media, which has not yet been sufficiently adapted to social channels; more and more public figures, and an increasing number of politicians who use social networks; as well as more and more government critics from different spheres of society.

## STATISTICS ON COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE IN SERBIA

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia<sup>1</sup> on the use of ICT in 2015, 64.4% have a computer, 63.8% have an Internet connection, and 56% have Broadband Internet. In 2016 there was an increase of 1.4% compared to 2015 and 2.6% in comparison to 2014, as 65.8% of households owns a computer.

YEAR	PC	INTERNET	BROADBAND INTERNET
2010	50.4%	39.0%	27.6%
2011	52.1%	41.2%	31.0%
2012	55.2%	47.5%	38.0%
2013	59.9%	55.8%	43.4%
2014	63.2%	62.8%	55.1%
2015	64.4%	63.8%	56.0%

Table 1: Households in Serbia having a computer (PC), Internet and broadband Internet connection

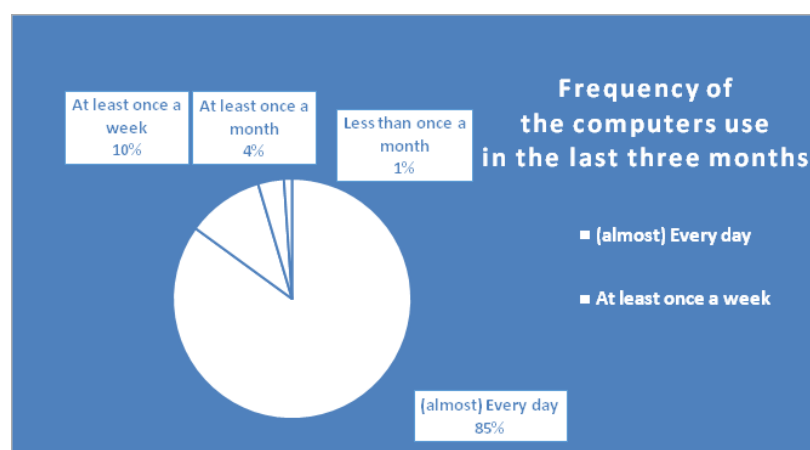
Research<sup>2</sup> from the 2016 shows that the differences can be seen when comparing the use of computers in urban (73.3%) and rural areas (54%) of Serbia. Compared to 2015, the gap has slightly increased, due to the growth rate of computers in urban and rural parts of Serbia. In urban areas of Serbia the growth rate is 2.2%, while in the rural part of Serbia is 0,1%, in comparison to 2015.

In Serbia, 67.2% used a computer in the last three months, 0.9% did not use a computer in the last three months, but they did use it in the past twelve months, and 4.7% of people used a computer more than a year ago. **27.2% of respondents have never used a computer.** The number of computer users in Serbia increased by 1.5% in comparison to 2015. 87.1% of people with

1 Source: [http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/29/10/17\\_Informacione\\_tehnologije.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/29/10/17_Informacione_tehnologije.pdf) visited: 13.03.2017.

2 Source: [http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/86/IKT\\_2016\\_pres\\_s.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/86/IKT_2016_pres_s.pdf) visited: 13.03.2017.

higher education in Serbia use a computer, 77.6% of people with secondary education and 37.6% of people with primary school education. In terms of frequency, on average, they have used a computer in the last three months, 85.1% of respondents said they had used it every day or almost every day, 10.4% at least once a week, 3.5% at least once a month, 1.1% less than once a month.



Graphic 1: Frequency of the computer use in the last three months

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia there is a 1.4% increase in the number of Internet users in comparison to 2015, by 3.9% in comparison to 2014, and by 12.3% compared to 2013. In addition, 64.7% of households have Internet access, which is an increase of 0.9% in comparison to 2015 and of 1.9% in comparison to 2014.

INTERNET USERS IN SERBIA (2016)	PENETRATION (% OF POPULATION)	POPULATION (2016)	NON-USERS (INTERNET LESS)
4,758,861	54%	8,812,705	4,053,844

Table 2: Internet Users in Serbia, 2016<sup>3</sup>

Most households with a monthly income of over 600 euros (94.7%) have an Internet connection, while the share of households with income up to 300 euros is only 46.1%.

In Serbia the three most common reasons that people use the Internet for are: reading online newspapers and magazines, searching for information about goods and services and for social network usage, as illustrated in the table 3.

1.	Reading online newspapers and magazines	77.4%
2.	Searching for information about goods and services	71.3%
3.	Social network usage (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs)	68.7%

Table 3: Types of Internet usage for private purposes in the last three months<sup>4</sup>

## STATISTICS ON SOCIAL NETWORK USERS IN SERBIA

*Data from 2016	Age						Gender	
	16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	male	female
Social network users (Facebook, Twitter)	90.3%	79.1%	67.1%	51.5%	53.1%	33.1%	70.1%	67.2%

*Data from 2016	Level of education		
	Lower than secondary	Secondary	High and higher education
Social network users (Facebook, Twitter)	55.8 %	60.0%	63.7%

3 Source: <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/> Visited: 13.02.2017

4 Source: [http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/86/IKT\\_\\_\\_2016\\_pres\\_s.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/86/IKT___2016_pres_s.pdf) Visited: 13.03.2017

*Data from 2016	Employment Status			
	Employed	Unemployed	Student	Other
Social network users (Facebook, Twitter)	62.5%	55.9%	79.6%	56.5%

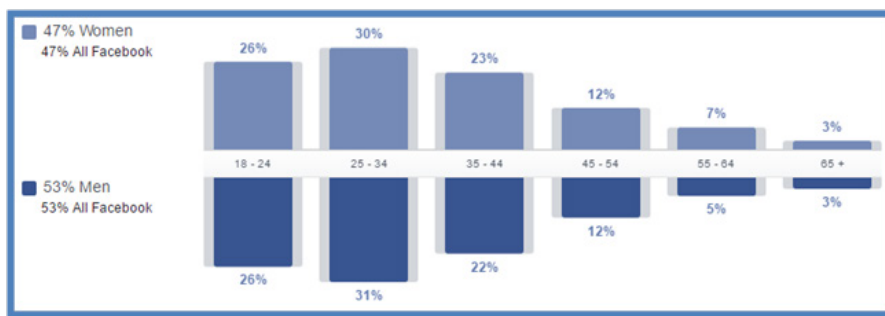
Table 4: The demographics of social network users in Serbia 2016<sup>5</sup>

The very important result of this research is that **90.3% of the Internet users in Serbia age 16 to 24 have an account on social networks** such as Facebook and Twitter.

### The demographics of Facebook users in Serbia in 2016

Facebook users from Serbia	
Women	47%
Men	53%

Table 5: Gender of Facebook users from Serbia<sup>6</sup>



Graphic 2: Age and Gender of Facebook users in Serbia

Serbian Pages with Largest Facebook Audience	
Novak Djokovic	7 235 189 fans
Ana Ivanovic	3 311 737 fans
NAXI RADIO 96,9MHz – Beograd	1 145 850 fans

Table 6: Serbian Pages with Largest Facebook Audience

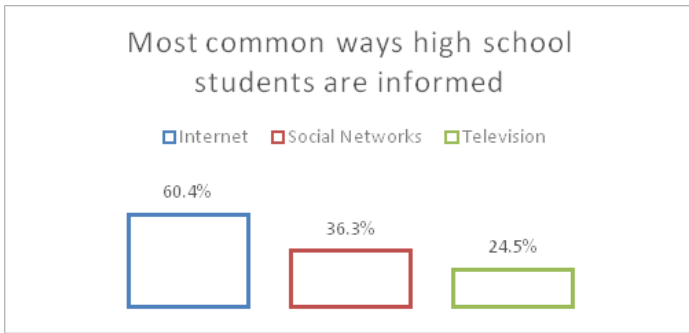
## STATISTICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The research<sup>7</sup> conducted by The Bureau of Social Research (BIRODI) shows that only 7.4% of surveyed high school students do not use Facebook, and 5.1% do not use social networks at all. Most high school students use Facebook, Instagram, Google+ and Twitter. A small number of them use Tumblr, Last.fm, Pinterest etc. Most high school users (34.8%) spend one or two hours a day on social media, 25.6% spend 2-4 hours, 23.5% less than one hour, and 15.8% spend more than 4 hours. 57.1% of the respondents who use Facebook, have more than 7 “friends” who they do not know personally. Slightly less than one-fifth does not have such a “friend” at all. The largest number of high school students are usually informed via Internet (60.4%). 36.3% is usually informed through social networks, and 24.5% via television. This group rarely get their information from weekly magazines and radio, as illustrated.

5 Source: <http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/02/25/89/ICT2016s.pdf> Visited: 13.02.2017

6 Source: <https://www.facebook.com/sds/audience-insights> Visited: 13.03.2017.

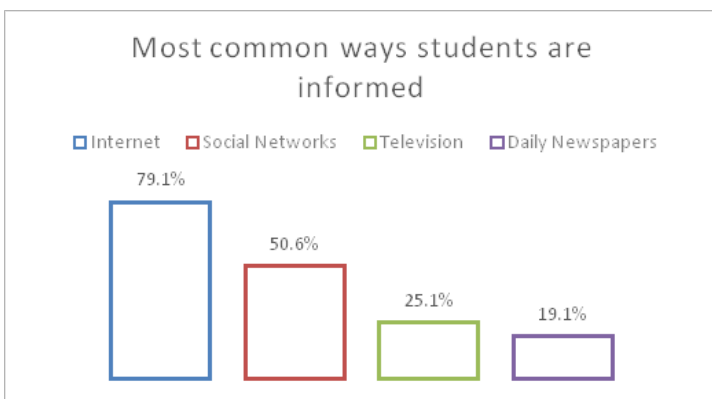
7 Source: <http://www.birodi.rs/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Medijska-pismenost-u-Srbiji-rezultati-istra%C5%BEivanja.pdf> visited: 13.03.2017.



Graphic 3: Most common ways high school students are informed

## STATISTICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

When asked to define the new media, university students gave the following answers: 53.8% think that the new media is Internet as a whole, 41.3% think that it is an online version of the traditional media, and 37% of the surveyed students think that new media are blogs. Nearly 30% of students equate new media with social networks, and 23.7% with all the news that can be found on the Internet. 43.9% of university students use Twitter, 32.7% Instagram, Google + 30.1%, 12.1% LinkedIn. **9.2% of the surveyed students do not use social networks, and only 4.9% of students do not use Facebook.** Nearly one-third of the students post on social networks several times a week, 24.6% several times a day, and approximately one-fifth of students does it several times a month. **Nearly 80% of surveyed students use social media to follow the development of an event, as the source of information.** 71.6% use them for private messaging. A one-third of surveyed students use social networks to express opinions on relevant social topics. Students are mostly informed through the Internet and social networks. 79.1% of them said they are usually informed through the Internet, 50.6% through social networks, 25.1% via television. **Only 19.1% read daily newspapers.**



Graphic 4: Most common ways students are informed

Largest number of journalism students (47.7%) is informed through new media, 33.9% follow both new and traditional media, while only 1.1% gets information exclusively from traditional ones.

## STATISTICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

**74% of the journalists in Serbia use Facebook**, about half of them have Twitter and LinkedIn accounts, 38.1% have one on Google+, 12.8% use Instagram, and 11.4% of the journalists interviewed do not use social networks. 71.5% of them said that they use social networks to follow the development of an event, as the data source, while slightly over 55% responded they use them for monitoring the work of other media and for private messaging. Approximately one in four journalist post on social networks several times a week. **23% post on a daily basis**, while 22% visit and read content on social networks, but they do not post anything.



## PANDORA'S BOX -SOCIAL MEDIA IN SERBIA

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As a mildly developed democracy with not very stable economic situation and as a typical Balkans' traditional state (a bit conservative) Serbian citizens were quite a lot attached to traditional media (mostly to newspapers and TV). Transition to social media in terms of treating them as credible enough, was slow and lacked trust. Not counting younger part of population, that process was very slow and not so promising, says Staletovic. He also believes that probably the best example when the turnover really happened was noted in May 2014 during unprecedented floods that hit Serbia, in particular the Serbian town Obrenovac. Due to the extraordinary situation where traditional media were slow and not able to cover the whole region, Facebook and Twitter played a crucial role. After these events, and many people being engaged in sharing information, offering assistance and exchanging opinions – it was obvious that **social media became a part of information and communication process in Serbia**.

**Srdjan Staletovic**, communication expert and team leader of *Media Trips to EU* program, says that nowadays, **social media usage in Serbia is common and popular**, judging by some of the latest estimations that there are more than 3,8 million of active Facebook accounts with many tweeting, posting on Instagram and YouTube, a lot of youngsters chatting via Snapchat and almost everyone using some sort of social media while reading information via Android or iOS gadgets. **Ivan Minic**, editor of MojaFirma.rs and lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communication, agrees, and adds that people are quite active, and they are spending a lot of time on social media platforms. Also, they are more and more interesting to advertisers, and there are more and more people working on branding themselves on social media and producing and publishing content.

Social media in Serbia is primarily used by young and middle-aged people, rarely older ones, and social networks in our country, especially Facebook, are used primarily for the “life simulation” and self-promotion within virtual “friends”, says **Maja Vukadinovic**, cultural and media analyst. She also believes that many users of social networks do not personally know most people with whom they contact or exchange views in this way. Also, Vukadinovic adds, **social networks are for many people in Serbia a significant source of information** - for some even the primary. All those who want to be comprehensively informed about political and social topics and especially young people prefer to use social media, but traditional. The people in Serbia who have the need to express opinion on various topics often use social networks to comment on social phenomena. **Predrag Blagojevic**, journalist and editor-in-chief of news-portal Juznevesti and the president of AOM/Association of On-line Media in Serbia, agrees, but adds that instead of being a catalyst for the reaction, **social media acts as an antistatic**. He also adds that instead of showing emotions (displeasure) in specific activities in places where it would have the effect (on the street, in public debates, ...) citizens believe that their task is done by clicking like, share, retweet.

**Robert Čoban**, co-owner and president of the Serbian media company Color Press Group, believes that Facebook continues to dominate and it is the most widespread network; Instagram is booming, especially among younger and “superficial”, while the Twitter population is still considered a social network for the “elite”, the place where political and value judgments and attitudes are stated, he says. Blagojevic explains that while the political momentum is conspicuous on Twitter, on Facebook most of the activity is reduced to an entertainment, while on the Instagram there is nothing but the simplest entertainment.

## JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Media started using social networks and, soon after, **abusing** the fact that there were so many people on it and that the news spread so fast, states Minic. Čoban also speaks about traditional media abusing social media saying that a large number of media, especially internet-portals, do not have journalists - just people who follow what celebrities share on social networks and make news out of it - from entertainment to politics. Also, a large number of web-sites expects the highest number of visits particularly through social networks. These facts point out that the media today would be impossible without social networks, at least the vast majority of them, believes Čoban.

Maja Vukadinovic thinks that **social media has the most influence on journalists and editors in Serbia in terms of selection of topics and interviewees**, focusing on a specific problem. The content of social networks represents inspiration for journalists who are increasingly transmitting news, comments or interesting things that are posted on someone's account on social networks. Minic agrees, and adds that sometimes **social media is a good place for seeding viral information**, but frequently the dust settles down quickly.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INFLUENCE ON THE PUBLIC

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When talking about the influence of the social media in Serbia, Čoban says that in many cases **it affects the public more and faster than traditional media**. On the other hand, Vukadinovic thinks that social media affects just part of the public in Serbia: the educated, young people who follow trends and those who are interested in the different interpretations of social phenomena. But, according to Staletovic, some researchers claim that social media are less confidential and lack trust at the general level, but are more direct, less controlled and mainly free.

On this topic, Blagojevic says that **social networks are potentially a very powerful tool, and even a weapon**. However, organized campaigns are very rare, and even more rare are the ones backed by the well-designed activity, he adds. Therefore, unfortunately, the events on social networks are most often reduced to activating the lowest instincts and primal feelings, which as a rule coincides with the editorial concept of the Balkan tabloids. Minic agrees with Blagojevic, saying that since social media reach is based on users' reactions the level of journalism is rock bottom, and the **content is pandering to the lowest human instincts**, explaining that it is effective in terms of reactions – clicks – page views, but as a result there is almost no real content left, and even if there is something meaningful it is “lost in the sea of crap”.

Unlike Blagojevic and Minic, Staletovic thinks that social media affects the performance of traditional media mainly by making them better and more reactive and responsive. Along with strengthening social profiles, Serbian media strengthens comments and readers' interaction pages. What made traditional media more powerful is shifting to social media profiles (Facebook or Twitter). He adds that the good example of becoming more and more influential is the Serbian leader in number of web hits, the daily Blic which is also the third fast growing community compared with all social media accounts (Twitter in particular) judging by Socialbakers experts.

However, Maja Vukadinovic points out that **most traditional media do not adapt their content to social media**, and publish them in their original form – this primarily refers to newspaper articles that are rarely enriched by infographics or video materials. Therefore, the traditional media in Serbia is still not fully adapted to the new age and needs of social media users, and this is especially true for Twitter accounts of traditional media, she says. Blagojevic agrees, saying that decision-makers in the media have a very superficial approach, explaining that most often they see social media as a copy-paste version of its online editions or often as a single online edition, resulting in just another channel of **communication in one direction**.

## SOCIAL MEDIA SETTING THE AGENDA

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There are some examples where some Serbian bloggers initiated wider media interest or debate by some blog-posts or by mobilizing crowd on some important issues, says Staletovic. Robert Čoban also believes that it often happens, because a large number of traditional media does not cover numerous events because they believe that it would irritate the government. Maja Vukadinovic agrees with Staletovic and Čoban, saying that people in Serbia would not even learn about many protests and important social events if it were not for Facebook or Twitter. She also adds that increasingly, **users of social media in Serbia record events** with the mobile phones and use the “live” option for posting on social networks. These “reports” are particularly useful during protests and political (civil) assembly, which most traditional media ignore or do not report about objectively.

Staletovic also adds that in the current media scene in Serbia where the Government limits traditional media in opening some issues relevant for public agenda but “hot” – several blogs and web-portals serve the purpose. Staletovic mentions one good example, a blog that analyses aviation and flights, Tango six – where serious and complete analyses appeared many times before traditional media and in a more competitive manner. Some cases like the tragic death of 6 people in the fall of Serbian Army helicopter as well as some more common issues (“how safe Serbian planes are”, “who is responsible for importing the Russian MIG 29” etc.) were launched by this blog and further exploited by traditional media. He adds that traditional media very often end up in a situation of quoting stories and reports from blogs and mentioned web portals rather than exploring them.

Predrag Blagojevic thinks that this is not due to the fact that traditional media editors are not aware of certain topics on social networks, but it is the manifestation of the **self-censorship and censorship**. Of course, editors are often to blame because

they ignore the views that many social actors (public officials, politicians, activists,...) express on social networks, arguing that it is informal communication. Staletovic agrees and states that generally traditional media considers social media as an informal source of information and still demonstrates resistance in mentioning them. Robert Čoban believes that if a topic or event “breaks” in social media, traditional media would follow only if their “editorial policy” “allows” and it is increasingly not the case, so these events remain only on social networks that now have greater “reach” than many daily newspapers or magazines in Serbia.

## ***SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN OASIS OF FREE SPEECH***

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Ivan Minic states that there is almost a parallel media world of underground online media, and they do get significant number of visits, since the topics are frequently provocative and interesting to masses. Staletovic says that in Serbia some people are “banned” from the traditional media, but still no one who was banned made a success in appearing on social media. The most recent case is the ex editor of pro-Government daily Vecernjenovosti, Srdjan Skoro, who was sacked as editor after criticizing Government policies via Serbian Public broadcaster RTS. Mr. Skoro opened a Twitter account and was active for a while via social networks but stopped on his own, reminds Staletovic.

Vukadinovic states that people who openly criticize the current authorities generally do not have access to traditional media. However, she says, **we can not qualify all traditional media the same**: Kokan Mladenovic, Janko Baljak or Bojana Maljevic - who sharply criticize the Government, can not be heard on the national television - RTS, but they appear as interlocutors in NIN, Nedeljnik, Vreme, Baljak and Bojana are also very present on Twitter. Maja Vukadinovic also emphasizes that the question is to whom the voice of the social media reaches out – “I’m afraid, above all of like-minded people”. Blagojevic agrees with Vukadinovic, and says that we cannot generalize and say that all traditional media ban, explaining that we can only talk about the attitude of pro-government media to the “enemies of the state”.

There are some cases where whistleblowers appeared on social media and made progress in targeting the problem from the public agenda, says Staletovic. These cases are frequent and well received by the public but they lack public support and further engagement. Lack of support to whistleblowers on social media probably comes out of unclear instructions on what one is supposed to do when he/she sees a whistleblowers’ announcement. Practically, when one notices that the problem is reported on, after quoting it and sharing to friends no other action is taken. Fear is not the reason – it’s more likely not knowing what you are supposed to do when you notice someone’s report on violation of any kind, he explains. Čoban believes that the problem with potential “whistleblowers” in Serbia is that they fear their social networks and the Internet in general do not guarantee enough anonymity and security, and they are afraid to publish their “findings” in such a way.

Minic says that there are whistleblowers on social media, especially when it comes to mobbing and corruption, and Maja Vukadinovic states that she doesn’t know whether Stevan Dojcinovic (KRIK) could be characterized as a whistleblower, but he is the only one she can think of.

## ***SOCIAL MEDIA STARS***

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It is now official – almost everybody in Serbia follows Novak Djokovic on Twitter. Not only him – there are some other celebrities: DJs, singers, actors... but also some strange characters and hidden agenda creatures. In other words, **Pandora’s box with social media in Serbia is widely open so anyone could join**, says Staletovic. Stars of social media in Serbia are: Istok Pavlovic, blogger and lecturer at the faculty; Miloje Sekulic, an internet expert; Twitterer Nicimlazvan, which is the authentic star of social media; Journalist Biljana Lukic and director Stasa Koprivica are very influential on Twitter. Also the singer Vlado Georgiev. I do not know who is “hiding” behind the nickname AstroG on Twitter - but I consider that person influential, says Maja Vukadinovic. There are some Twitter stars among Serbian journalists who are active on social networks and their voices are quite loud on social media (Slavisa Lekic, Slobodan Georgiev, Tatjana Vojtehovski) and people support and trust them, believes Staletovic.

Čoban emphasizes that some of the social media stars have managed quite well to monetize their followers by becoming promoters of certain brands or political parties.

When it comes to trust, people who are critically oriented towards the Government in any way, socially engaged, curious,

those who want to hear the other side and generally younger people are more likely to believe the stars of social media, others trust traditional media more, says Vukadinovic. On the other hand, Staletovic says that people do not tend to believe those “stars” more, but they surely pay them a lot of attention. Traditional media in Serbia are mostly boring and predictive with “bad reputation” from the past, while social media (including those owned by stars) are fresh, new, concise and tend to support two-way communication. When talking about this topic, Čoban reminds that we must bear in mind that “the people” in Serbia also means over 50% of those who do not actively use the Internet and social networks (older and rural part of the population).



Minic says that he doesn't believe that the Government tries to control stars or influential informal leaders, because their influence is not a threat to anyone in charge. But Staletovic reminds that there are some known cases where owners of some accounts were questioned by the police because of publishing content that may be subject to law violation. In case of Serbian social media star and make-up artist Jelena Macic police never filed evidence that she violated any regulation apart of accusing her of being vulgar in public speech. Vukadinovic says that the fact that the current Prime Minister comments tweets of Jelena Macic at press conferences speaks in favor of the thesis that **the Government is trying to control the informal leaders from social networks.**

Blagojevic, says that this type of controlling happens, not in a direct way, but by discrediting them in tabloids and via their “bots”. On the other side, they are trying to artificially build “influential” people, he adds. Čoban also says the phenomenon of “bots” who fill the posts of influential Twitter users with negative comments is well known. He also reminds us of individuals who were brought in for activities on social networks, lost their jobs or experienced other inconvenience.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICIANS

Initially politicians on social media were exceptions, the so-called “twitterers” among politicians (Gordana Comic, Goran Jestic, etc.) and today almost all politicians on both the left and the right use accounts on social networks very actively, especially Twitter, says Čoban. As of last year (2016), politicians in Serbia started using social media to express their views more and more. Though most of the politicians that use social media do that regularly, still they like traditional media more, believes Staletovic, and Vukadinovic agrees, stating that with the exception of Sasa Radulovic and recently Sasa Jankovic, the others primarily use traditional media.

Blagojevic says that politicians use social networks same as traditional media –as just **another channel of one way communication.** Social media is not used for the exchange of views, but as a platform for their stating. Minic adds that social media is an important part of politicians' PR platform.



## SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FAKE NEWS

**Fake news is a big problem in Serbia.** When talking about this topic, Ivan Minic mentions a very popular satirical site called Njuz.net, which publishes this kind of articles daily. Many times regular media picked up these articles and got fooled, in some cases even international media, he adds. Also, there were cases of unconfirmed and false news being published and later revoked. The result of **extremely low levels of media literacy**<sup>8</sup> is a huge vulnerability to false news, states Predrag Blagojevic. If we do not consider Njuz.net, but only the fakenews published by the media (the tabloids), it is obvious that a large part of the audience reacts, often expressing not a shred of doubt.

8 More at: <http://mir.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/serbia-fin.pdf> Visited: 23.03.2017.

Moreover, they are ready to aggressively defend their confidence in the “truth”, he adds.

Staletovic reminds of the case when one influencer from Serbia wanted to play the role of new George Orwell (to test the public by airing fake news). He wrote an extra Internet page (in English) he registered it in Sweden, that famous Serbian Academic and writer Dobrica Cosic was proposed for a Nobel Prize for literature in 2011. More than 45% Serbian traditional media published the news (they did not check it on the official Nobel Prize web site) so the whole episode ended by withdrawing the news from sites and shows including denying the originality. People’s reaction was mostly oriented towards the lack of trust in media (both social media and traditional) and confirmation that “post-truth” phase arrived in Serbia contrary to general assumption that Serbia is late in trends comparing to the rest of the planet.

**The problem is that there is no serious and regular discussion in Serbia on the issue of fake news**, says Staletovic. There are some isolated cases where professional associations of journalists dedicate one or two sessions to the problem but the focus of the discussion goes in some other directions. In some cases, in high schools, as part of some lectures dedicated to media literacy there are debates on trust, sources, how to be sure, how to stop fake news – but again, these discussions and debates mainly target digital literacy and not the real problem of fake news or creation of news with some purpose other than reporting, explains Srdjan Staletovic.

Vukadinovic thinks that **there are sporadic discussions about the topic of fake news**, and panels where this topic is analyzed, among others, but she does not believe that their reach and influence is large. It looks like freedom of the media and the difficult financial situation of journalists are the primary topics for the media profession in Serbia. “I am afraid that the issue of false news has not seriously become an agenda”, says Vukadinovic. She also adds that she has the impression that professors are, much more than the journalists, concerned about the false news, but it often remains in the domain of academic discussion. Čoban agrees with others and says that when it comes to the Serbian society, that discussion has not yet had its turn, because the traditional media is flooded with ‘fake news’ and often for well-planned reasons such as “media racket”, or attempt to mislead voters or consumers on behalf of someone else.

Predrag Blagojevic says that there’s almost no hint of discussion about the problem of fake news. **Press Council as a self-regulatory body whose credibility is in constant growth could be an important factor**. Blagojevic even proposed that the media who have expressed their willingness to accept the jurisdiction of the Council, or even just declare that they want to respect the Code of Journalists, begin the process of working on building the brand of the Press Council together - through the campaign of putting the logo of the Council on the title page of the printed edition or the top of the website, which would represent a kind of guarantor of quality and accuracy.

## CONCLUSION

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Social media are very popular in Serbia. For many people they are a significant source of information – especially for youngsters and those who do not trust traditional media. People who want to hear the other side of the story, and generally younger people, are more likely to believe the stars of social media than the traditional media.

Some think that social networks affect the public both more and faster than traditional media, but as Čoban reminds us, we must bear in mind that “the people” in Serbia also means over 50% of those who do not actively use the Internet and social networks (the older and rural part of the population).

Traditional media are present on social networks, but they are still not fully adapted to the new age and the needs of social media users. In most cases, social media pages of traditional media are just copies of their online editions. Two-way communication is very rare.

Usually page administrators just publish news from web sites and do not interact with users. This also happens with social media accounts of politicians, who often use them just to state their mind, not to interact.

Very often traditional media gets the inspiration from social networks, but in most cases the discourse is banal and trivial. When it comes to protests or important social events, traditional media isn’t always ready to follow social media, because of self-censorship and censorship that is widespread in Serbia.

People who openly criticize the current authorities generally do not have access to traditional media, so they try to express themselves using Facebook or Twitter. Because of that, the government is trying to control the informal opinion leaders, and there are known cases of people who were brought in for activities on social networks, lost their jobs or experienced some

other inconvenience like being called “an enemy of the state” or “a spy”<sup>9</sup>.

Media freedom in Serbia is a big issue and so is fake news. Another problem is that there is no serious and regular discussion on the issue of fake news. Extremely low level of media literacy in Serbia is also connected to this. Press Council could be an important factor in solving these problems, as well as constant media and digital education of all people, regardless of age.

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<sup>9</sup> Example: <http://www.informer.rs/vesti/drustvo/61690/FOTO-SADO-MAZO-FRANCUSKI-SPIJUN-zapravo-glavni-urednik-KRIK> Visited: 23.03.2017.

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# New Media in Serbia: A Realm of Freedom or a Pandora's Box?

