

The Transformation of Media Vis-À-Vis the Transformation of Society in Kosovo During the Period Of 1990-2020

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study the transformation of media vis-a-vis the transformation of society in Kosovo during the period of 1990-2020, as a common and completely inevitable journey either from one side or the other. Seeing communication as one of the key segments, we see how this transformation both mediatic and social has developed within the last three decades, which have an extraordinary interconnectivity and history. The methodology of this paper will be the qualitative methodology, where we will do theoretical research on the progress of this transformation, both mediatic and social. This paper is based on literature research by local and international authors and experts, the collection and analysis of data related to mediatic and social transformation. Using the case of Kosovo as a study, and also the different periods within three decades of the great transformation that has taken place in this society, we see how the mediatic transformation is also developed from lack to excess of information and also to technological development. This study contributes to the literature on “mediatic transformation vis-a-vis social transformation in Kosovo during the period of 1990-2020”, demonstrating significant effects for an equally important period of time

Keywords: *Mediatic Transformation, Social Transformation, Lack of Information, Technological Development*

INTRODUCTION

The mediatic development and transformation in Kosovo during the period of 1990-2020, is a very important issue for Kosovo, but also of general interest, especially in the field of media and their development, but also of the great and rapid transformations that have taken place within society.

The importance and weight of this issue should be seen from two perspectives, the one of the lack of information and the one of the excess of information.

Such a situation undoubtedly produces and imposes a circumstance of sociological treatment, which has always been transformative and challenging.

During this time period of 1990-2020, the Kosovar society has experienced development, but also a great mediatic transformation, in accordance with other socio-cultural and political courses in the country. Alongside the permanent development, transformation and construction of this path of receiving and transmitting information, the Kosovar society is the one that paid a high price in its struggle to receive, but also to transmit information.

It was affected either by the lack or by the excess of information. It was challenged by both the presence and absence of information.

So, further on we will see the fact on how this society, in the first phase, has suffered a lot from the lack of information, in contrast to the second phase where we will see how it is challenged by its excess, which also produces a new social and socializing course with and on information.

However, we cannot and should not exclude the fact that beyond the mediatic development and transformation, the Kosovar society has been obliged to adapt to the new circumstances created, first with the impossibility and powerlessness of maintaining and developing the media, and then also with new opportunities and developments not only created, but also imposed.

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This transformation and development at the same time, of course has its versatility, in the constant effort to be in step with other courses, and in this manner it has moved in this direction.

Although this issue has been seen and studied chronologically, historically and mediatically even earlier, however in the sociological field there is a lack of such a study, i.e. the lack of a study of this Effort to make the Kosovar society a society that has, but also that transmits information.

Among the main local authors who have dealt with this issue is sociologist Ibrahim Berisha, in his studies, both on the lack of information and the “excess” of information, very often unverified.

Whereas, in terms of communication, development and transformation of the media by international authors who have mainly dealt with these issues, we will single out authors like Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel, sociologist Eric Maigret, Francis Balle, Joseph R. Dominick, Marshall McLuhan, Pierre Bourdieu, Edwin Baker, Philip M. Napoli who have dealt with certain issues which of course will be inevitable for treatment during this paper, where as a special case we have the case of Kosovo.

By combining theories on the development and transformation of the media, and taking the case of Kosovo as a case of study, we will try to give it a new and other look which will create another approach in relation to the general courses.

This Effort requires more study than reporting. A study that would see the course of this Effort from the lack of information to the excess of information, as a long and challenging journey.

In this attempt to give the sociological explanation to this Effort, and in this path to provide the findings of this Journey we will see how once the lack of information was the main problem, while today, over-information presents a new, but at the same time, a big problem for the same society.

Although the first challenge has been a more pronounced problem in the Kosovar society, the second challenge presents a global problem, in the course of major technological developments and consequently also of social networks themselves as a great opportunity for the expression of individuality, respectively as an extensive field of news production.

In the course of these developments, it will be seen how information and media have had a great weight for this society in both time periods, and with the same weight is the great media transformation that has taken place in this society.

The dividing lines of these two periods are also the connecting lines of these two different extremes with which the Kosovar society has been challenged, and the media itself in a very volatile terrain in the political, cultural and mediatic plane.

In such circumstances, the building of this Effort, or the development of this mediatic field, produced the need for unification beyond the theoretical idea, in the practical field.

The Lack of Information in the 90's

At the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990, the sphere of the media in Kosovo was affected as a result of the changes that took place.

Despite the fact that “Communication is the essential way of agreement between people, a process for survival of the individual, group and society” (Berisha, "Zhanre të gazetarisë" 2010), here, the normal order of communication within this society, but also outside of it, begins to break.

In this regard, the importance of communication and communication itself, is only an introduction to the great topic, the great importance of the development of communication, but also the presence or absence of information within a society

Numerous scholars have paid special attention to communication, seeing its extraordinary role in all social processes, especially in those of human interaction and behaviour. In this spirit, we single out Luhmann and De Giorgi, who see communication as a synthesis which comes from three planes, such as: information, the

act of communication, comprehending” (Luhmann Niklas, Giorgi De Raffaele 2016). However, it is important to emphasize the fact that communication has expanded more and more and in this regard we can say that the dimension of communications has intensified and expanded. “The expansion of communications is in an intensive process, so even today the human has become not only subject, but also the object of this technology which is developing with an extraordinary dynamics, not infrequently helping and facilitating communication, but also endangering, besides the form and content also its being social, human and solidar” (Berisha 2014, 161).

Over time we see how the ways, but also the means of communication beyond development, have also undergone an extraordinary transformation in all societies. As a result, today communication itself has a different look, as well as a different approach. The communication ratio today has become more frequent, and has intensified, thus taking on a new global dimension.

Author Joseph R. Dominick, in his theories on communication, among other things raises the question of whether it is necessary *to imagine what it would be like if suddenly the whole system never existed*, and this helps us in our quest to understand in essence the tendencies to ban or obstruct communication through the closure of the media.

The weight of communication for a society is heavy, it is basic, it is elementary, it is substantial to pass to the next steps. Because, communication opens paths or non-communication closes even those that exist. From this, we see that it is without alternative, irreplaceable and incomparable. “From one side we can consider the perspective examination of a sociologist and see through wide-angle lenses the functions that mass communication fulfils in relation to the whole society (this approach is sometimes called *macroanalysis*).

This point of view focuses on the apparent goal of the mass communicator and emphasizes the natural intent observed in media content. Alternatively, we can look through magnifying lenses at individual content recipients, the audience, and ask them how they use mass media (this approach is called *microanalysis*)” (Joseph 2010, 70).

The obstacles that appeared in regard of Communication in the '90s in the Kosovar society were as hindrance for stopping information and the conveying and strengthening of the truth, thus claiming another “truth”. However, there were not and there are no two truths. There is only one! And it can only be understood through communication. Therefore, it was equally important that the communication so far be hindered or even disabled. Seen in the history of media development in Kosovo, we see that “until 1990, Kosovo had its own institutions and media, such as the Radio and Television of Prishtina, six local radio stations, the founder and financier of which was the then Assembly of Kosovo and a considerable number (86) newspapers and magazines from the field of information, literature and science, 12 newsletters of various fields, movable and immovable property and a considerable material wealth, which guaranteed their functioning” (Zejnullahu 2017, 16).

All of these operated, albeit under difficult circumstances, and operated under the applicable laws of the former Yugoslav federation. “The Kosovo media operated in accordance with the laws of the former Yugoslav federation until 1990. Kosovo, with the adopted constitution in 1974, was one of the eight federal units and based on this constitutional structure, enjoyed the right of the operating of autonomous media, with a radio and television centre and a local radio network. Other media systems in seven other federal units were built on this model” (Berisha 2014, 157).

However, it is exactly the year 1990 which results with the closure of institutions also in the field of media, which produces a new media reality, for which such a situation undoubtedly poses new challenges in facing the functioning of life on other levels, not only in the media level.

As a result of such a situation, communication becomes more difficult, and the situation in the field of information only worsens.

In this regard, the situation presents a number of other challenges, but the most important ones are precisely the disconnection of communication, the lack of information, or even obtaining any partial information, we can say more precisely, with certain difficulties of confirmation.

Throughout this challenge, which affects the poor media system in Kosovo, however, the year 1990 marks a major regression in the field of media with their closure, and this of course produces difficulties in the communication process within a society and thus produces a completely new reality.

In this way, the society entered a complete information darkness, and this also hindered the normal communication within the society, “the reason was that with the takeover of the television of Prishtina and the dismissal or resignation of its journalists, most Kosovars changed the radio channel or of television” (Judah 2002, 122).

In such a circumstance, it was required to find certain solutions which would be in function of facing the reality, but also of facing such a policy.

Following the finding of a solution in 1990, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) launched an initiative to build a news agency, “among the most serious enterprises in the fight against information darkness in Kosovo was the establishment of the Kosovo Information Center, established in 1991 by the Democratic League of Kosovo, with the aim of later becoming the National State News Agency. The first leader of this centre was Ibrahim Berisha, and then, from October 1993 until the day of his assassination, on January 11, 1999, the KIC was led by Enver Maloku” (Zejnnullahu 2017, 33).

In this manner, efforts were made to build a system of information resistance, because with the existence of information, it could be tried to change the situation, and that the reality of course had to penetrate beyond the borders of Kosovo.

Also, within the Kosovo Information Center, the magazine “Ora” was published, and later the newspaper “Informatori”, which was the evening newspaper, and which was tried to be distributed throughout Kosovo, but of course due to the created circumstances it was already impossible to send it to every centre of Kosovo, but had the greatest spreading in Prishtina, and which was a good summary of the events of the day.

Unable to function within the country, many newspapers began to relocate their editorial offices abroad so that their functioning would not be hindered, and thus they would be able to survive.

In this function, other media were also created, but which mainly had their editorial offices abroad as a result of such a situation, and in this spirit, newspaper “Bota Sot” started operating in 1995, which was published in Switzerland. “During this period, several important magazines and newspapers were published, such as “Bota e re”, which was a student body, “Gazeta Shqiptare”, the “Kombi” newspaper, which had short periods of publication, especially the last two” (Zejnnullahu 2017, 31).

Such a situation was getting worse every day, especially when the war started, which made it impossible for people to survive in their country and their homes, let alone the survival of the media system, or communication.

In such circumstances, a large part of the media in the country were forced to close their editorial offices, and so they began to find ways and opportunities not to stop their publication, i.e. information.

Even in these circumstances, ways were found for this important part of the society to operate, and in this way in April 1999, “Koha Ditore” resumed its publication in Macedonia.

The situation had already changed drastically, the media system in Kosovo made a relocation together with the citizens of the country who left their homes heading to Macedonia or Albania.

So, we see that despite such a situation, however, there were attempts for the media system to be there where the people were, abroad, in Albania and Macedonia, and that the journalist who stayed all the time in Prishtina, Xhemail Mustafa describes this moment as a life opposite the general mediatic, cultural and political horror, “There where the people are, the newspapers are going as well!” (Mustafa 2000, 150).

Journalism as a special field, was also exercised in special conditions within the Kosovar society. However, with the end of the war, a difficult era of journalism in Kosovo also ended, and also the great obstacles it faced.

The Great Media Transformation after 1999

In this regard, a recovery also begins in the field of media, like in other areas of society, “after 1999, through international donations, a dynamic network of electronic and print media was built. At the end of 2001, in Kosovo, 48 Albanian-language radios, 22 Serbian-language radios, two Turkish and two Bosnian radio stations, and three Roma-language radios were presented to operate. In addition to the radios presented to broadcast programs in one language, in Kosovo, especially in mixed municipalities where minorities live alongside Albanians, there were radios which were operating in two or three languages: 2 radios in Albanian and Serbian, 2 radios in Albanian, Serbian and Turkish, 2 Serbian and Roma language radios. Programs were broadcasted by 15 televisions in Albanian, 6 in Serbian, 1 in Albanian, 1 in Serbian, 1 in Turkish and 1 in Albanian-Bosnian and Turkish” (Berisha, “Mediakultura” 2014, 159).

While we see that a very difficult phase coming to an end, a new phase is entered, which is known as one of the biggest transitions that has occurred within journalism in the Kosovar society, which has to do with the transition within society, especially in the field of media.

“The media in transition, which are found together with the societies, and which work in an intensive transition process, need more assistance programs (to strengthen free and pluralistic media), those programs to include comprehensive reforms of legal frameworks, vocational training and the creation of a real system of public information where the public interest of the citizen is realized more directly.

In order to keep the attention on the media, this explosive notion of modern society, needs to mark what it is today. The means of information, now known to the general public as the media, defined as the press, or the means of transmission (communication), have had throughout the twentieth century a very large and very complex, normative, professional and technological development” (Berisha, "Media dhe tranzicioni" 2007, 47).

With other general developments, especially with the great technological development, this field of society has also developed, and as a result we notice a new role also in the work of the journalist in particular, of the media in general.

And, this new role was brought by the internet, as a new and extremely influential field, where only through one click you can find everything you are looking for, even in the Kosovar society, as in any other society.

Faced with a situation from a great lack of freedom of expression, to extremely large opportunities, we have a great transformation from missing space to excessive space, which could otherwise be interpreted as a threat and a diversion of a social and journalistic culture, considering the fact that it can be published by anyone.

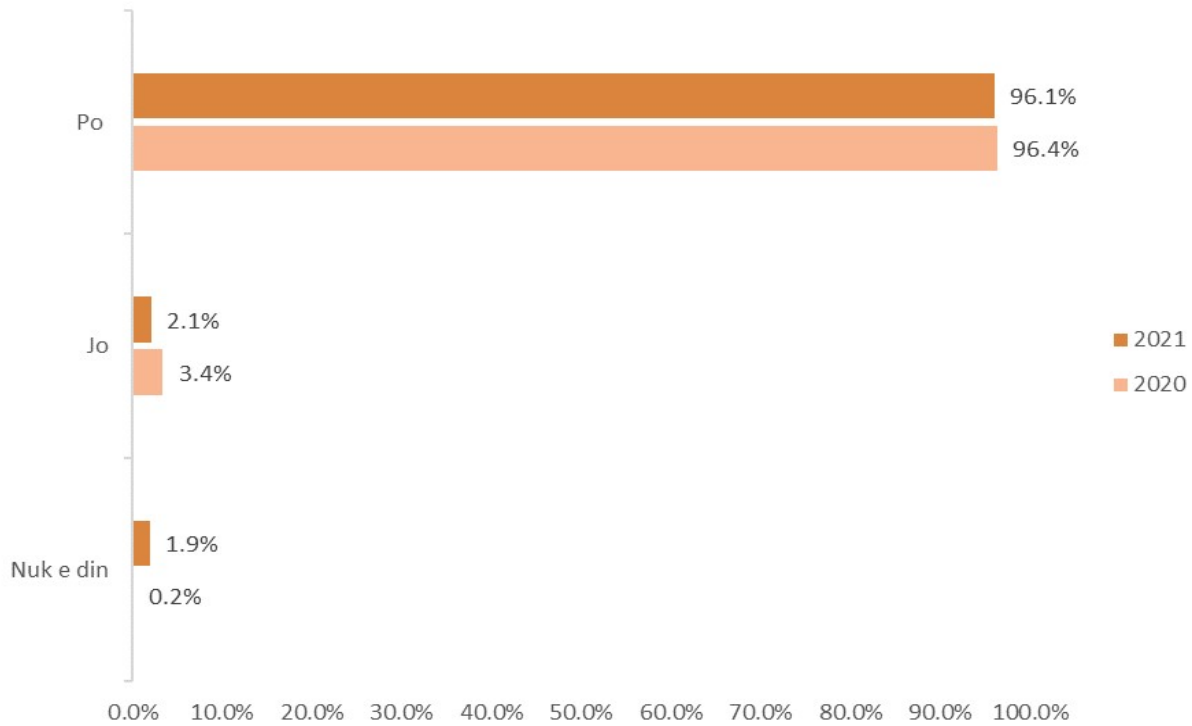
This entire threat is coming from exactly two great opportunities created by technological development and the Internet, “Likewise, the technology and dimension of educational communications has left communication sociologists in a dilemma, whether it also affects the resizing of human freedom. Technology is more powerful than the desire for social freedom, as technological development narrows the sphere of our freedom and any technological progress that is intended and desired helps precisely this restriction, Teodor Kazinski thinks” (Berisha, *AKADEMIA E SHKENCAVE DHE E ARTEVE E KOSOVËS* - KDU 303 .093.7 2014, 161-162).

Technological change is also being seen as an inevitable evil, or as Shumpeter calls it, “creative destruction” (Gillian 2015, 39), thus giving a new role to the individual and on the other hand empowering technological influence.

The Kosovar society within the period of 1990-2020, goes through a process of transformation from a great lack of freedom of expression, to an extraordinary space, freedom of judgment, thought and expression.

This is the great transformation that enabled the Internet to receive, as well as the transmission of information anytime and anywhere, and as a result of the great technological development and the tremendous impact of the Internet, this same transformation has affected the print media as well.

On what the real role of the Internet within Kosovar society is, can be understood when we look at the data of the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, which reflect graphically what the percentage of access to information technology in houses or apartments is.



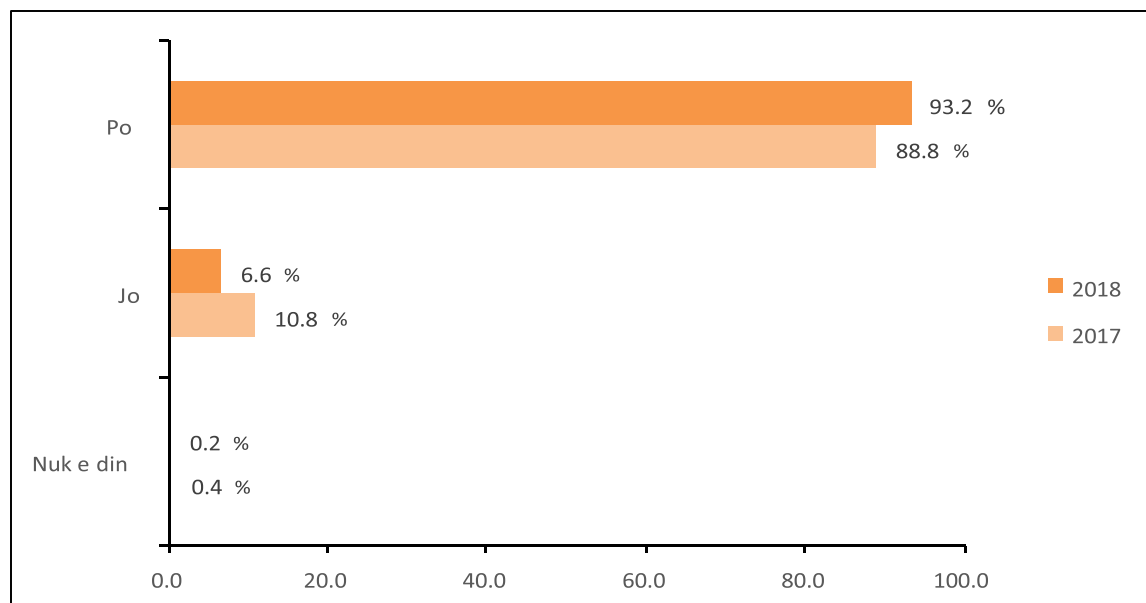
Graphic 1 (ASK 2021)

Such a thing is also proven based on the statistical report of Eurostat, where Kosovo in 2018, has the highest percentage in the region of households that have access at home.

Based on this report, we see that the largest percentage in the region for 2017 and 2018 of households that have access at home is held by Kosovo, “in 2017 with 89%, while in 2018 with 93%, which is then followed by Northern Macedonia in 2017 with 74% while in 2018 with 79%, followed by Montenegro in 2017 with 71% and in 2018 with 72%” (eurostat 2019).

In the case of Kosovo, the data for 2018 are fully consistent with the statistics of Eurostat and those provided by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics.

Below is a graphic representation of the percentage of access to information and communication technology in households>



Graphic 2 (ASK 2019)

The Closure Of Daily Newspapers And Opening Of News Portals

So, many of the daily newspapers have been forced to close due to lack of buyers, but also many of them have been forced to open their own portals, because as a result of the Internet and technological development, readers are already oriented towards online reading by giving end to the traditional way of getting informed.

This entire situation has undoubtedly created facilities in terms of acceptance, as well as in terms of information transmission, but has also added many challenges towards the media and society.

These opportunities, and this plethora of information, one of the best writers, Umberto Eco, describes very well the confrontation with these challenges, about which he says: “social media has given the right of speech to fools” (Lapsial 2016).

It is without doubt that this entire technological development has had the individual, but also the societies with excess information, enabling them to have sufficient access to their research on any problem, any cultural, or any country.

“This development has greatly facilitated the lives of people and has broken myths, but the boundaries between societies have been immersed in the meaninglessness of the former meaning, without any role in the field of technological, cultural and especially the mediatic cooperation” (Rahmani 2016, 602).

From a closed society in all possible aspects, especially in the mediatic field, to a society where contacts with the world are already in normal flow, and to a society integrated with European cultures and countries.

Now, “internet convergence and development have broken down old boundaries and resized media markets and consumption patterns” (Gillian 2015, 30), and this finding is clearly observed in our case, but also in the region.

Such a thing is proven better than anywhere else in the Kosovar society, which has already passed beyond the local borders with which it has been extremely challenged, and that it has gone further in redefining and redefining what it wants and why.

But in a society like ours, being in this transitional phase, of course that the majority of information in itself presented a great challenge, giving direction to the information according to the affiliation of the medium, or the political determination of the journalist in this case.

Pierre Bourdieu describes this process quite well, while stating that “the world of journalists is a divided world where there are conflicts, competition, hostility” (Bourdieu 2015, 28), and that such a thing is proven today tremendously, while we are faced with such an amount of information, but of course also the fight for speed.

In all this great media transformation the Kosovar society faced, at this stage, it was also challenged by the *fast and unverifiable news*, already accepting it as ordinary.

“Fake news is any form of visual material that is designed and written to change people’s opinion about an individual, an organization, or a belief. With the advent of multimedia editing tools, fake news can be easily made to look like a real one. Further, fake news is prone to abrupt dissemination through increasing accessibility of the internet and online social media outlets” (Shivam B. Parikh, Vikram Patil and Pradeep K. Atrey 2019).

And according to journalist Bill Kovatch, “if there are 500 different voices to tell what is happening, in these voices there will be corporations talking about profit purposes, political voices doing propaganda, there will be fraudsters but there will also be few sources that provide verified information. The important thing now is that in this large amount of information to know how to distinguish what is verified” (Ikonomi 2011). Such a reality was seen especially in the circumstances when the media market was supplemented by various information portals, which of course expanded it on the one hand, but on the other hand created significantly greater opportunities that among this plethora of information to also have a multitude of untruths, which in one way or another create a not so suitable ground for doing journalism.

“Fake news,” or fabricated information that is patently false, has become a major phenomenon in the context of Internet-based media. It has received serious attention in a variety of fields, with scholars investigating the antecedents, characteristics, and consequences of its creation and dissemination. Some are primarily interested in the nature of misinformation contained in false news, so that we can better detect it and distinguish it from real news. Others focus on the susceptibility of users—why we fall for false news and how we can protect ourselves from this vulnerability” (Maria D. Molina¹, S. Shyam Sundar¹, Thai Le¹, 2021)

All these developments and transformations in the field of media have come as a result of developments within society, including the political, social and economic ones.

In this regard, this three decade period has come in this spirit, and of course that one of the most affected areas within society, has been that of the media.

In this spirit, an extraordinary phase of transformation has come exactly in the period of Covid-19, where as a result of it there have been many developments in this direction.

This is especially noticeable in the print media, almost affected by technological development, the vast majority of which have almost completely closed their print versions, turning them into electronic portals. However, even the few that have existed or have resisted all this development, from the period of Covid-19, we see that in the case of Kosovo almost all print newspapers have been closed, “in Kosovo the printed newspapers have disappeared, making Kosovo the only country in the region and Europe without any such newspaper, weekly or monthly magazine, say Imer Mushkolaj, executive director of the Press Council of Kosovo and professor of journalism, Milazim Krasniqi” (Ahmeti 2021).

Alongside the other developments and transformations in these three decades, we see that there are many developments in the field of media, at the same time it underwent a development and an extraordinary transformation.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this paper we can conclude that the events developed within three decades in the Kosovar society 1990-2020, are almost completely interrelated, and in this form are inevitable in any field of study, if not seen as a whole.

From what has been seen so far, we can conclude that these three decades are decades of rapid development, but also not easy in dealing with the events that have occurred.

Likewise, we ascertain an effort not only for survival, but also for the survival of information and communication. Moreover, as in rare cases this effort leads to self-sacrifice. In this spirit we see that an extraordinary effort is taking place both to receive information and to transmit it. In the course of political developments, and of a great transition in society, the transition in the field of media is marked, where we see that due to lack of information, this society is already challenged by excess information, which is often offered in a not well confirmed manner.

Dealing with fake news is not only a concern for this society, of course as a result of a great technological development, and numerous opportunities to inform as well as to misinform, the world today faces fake news like never before.

What is ascertained in all this paper, which, without a doubt, will be a source of reference, is the fact that these three decades are decades of transition and great media development in Kosovo, especially of the print media.

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