

Aspects of the multimediality developed in Albanian online journalism

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Abstract

A large number of scholars consider multimediality as one of the essential features of online media. Distinguishing between "multi-media" and "multiple media", most researchers define the multimediality used in online media as the integration of two or more mediums or media formats in the process of reporting for online journalism.

Based on the theoretical literature, the proposed paper is intended to shed light on the specifications and features of multimediality developed into major news websites localized in Albania. The research on multimediality of the news websites is focused in two plans: At first are studied separately multimedia elements that are used in online news reporting. Thus, making a kind of deconstruction of the concept of multi-media, this paper studies the use and specifics of photos, infographics, animations, videos and audios, analysing them as separate multimedia elements used in online news reporting. Later, in another plan, these multimedia elements are studied as part of "multimedia storytelling" package. Multimedia storytelling applied through the integrated multimedia package, represents actually the highest level of multimediality of a news website and reflects the maximum use of the web capacity in this regard.

The work undertaken in this paper aims to highlight the experience and the problems of the multimediality applied in major news websites in Albania, in comparison with models, achievements and best global practices in this field. Under this optics it is hoped that this trial be a useful study for media agencies operating in the field of new media and online journalism. Analysis and conclusions of this study are supported by an extensive empirical research conducted over a period of several years by the author of this research. The study also offers relevant and useful recommendations for online media activity in the future.

Keywords: *multimedia, multiple media, multimediality, multimedia storytelling, multimedia package*

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Theoretical approach

In their book "Digital multimedia", Nigel Chapman and Jenny Chapman define digital *multimedia* as "any combination of two or more media, represented in digital form, sufficiently well integrated to be presented via a single interface or processed by a single computer program." These authors distinguish between "multimedia" and "multiple media" and point out that the difference between them can be better understood particularly from the user's point of view. According to these authors, users perceive different mediums as different modalities of communication such as text, image, audio, video, etc. In the case of "multiple media" there is a simple shift from one medium to the other. But in the case of multimedia, there is an integrated combination of these modalities (Chapman & Chapman, 2004: 7).

Regarding the multimediality used in online journalism, most scholars (for instance, Fagerjord, 2003, or Deuze, 2004) define it as the integration of more than one medium or media formats in the process of reporting the news on the web. Fagerjord is one of the most prominent authors studying specifically multimediality used in online journalism. He uses the term "rhetorical convergence" to describe the creation of different types of presentation of news in modern online journalism, through the integrated use of text, photographs, illustrations, music, Flash animations, video, live broadcasting and continuous updating" (Fagerjord, 2003).

Another author, Kevin Kawamoto, notes that multimedia content should look beyond technical structures or combinations of different pieces of information presented in different formats. While Amy Zerbain its approach to "multimedia package", notes that multimedia journalists have gone from a simple "inclusion of individual elements of multimedia" to "a more packaged online journalism", which aims to provide users of the internet with "new ways of understanding the information, a wider coverage and an increased level of their experience on how to obtain news." (Zerba, 2004).

Mark Deuze distinguishes two types of multimedia archetypes: superficial multimediality and the divergent paradigm. The simple

presence of the information presented in several different formats represents a superficial form of multimediaility. This is mostly a media presence of different modalities or a kind of "multiple media". While "divergent paradigm" of multimediaility has the ability to layer and link more information in a more organized and integrated way. According to Deuze, divergent paradigm requires that "all parts of the site to be developed from a multimedia starting point, offering users different ways to enter and navigate the site (Deuze, 2004).

Within the theoretical literature about multimediaility, there are numerous references to the *theory of remediation*, formulated by Bolter and Grusin (1999). According to Bolter and Grusin, internet network is equipped with the ability to remediate all existing forms of media in a single platform (Bolter&Grusin, 1999). Attention within multimediaility literature was also paid to discussions on "graphic journalism", which can be very useful and can add value to the multimedia journalism on the web.

The multimediaility of online journalism in Albania

This paper studies the multimediaility used in six major news websites operating in Albania, namely: top-channel.tv, balkanweb.com, shekulli.com.al, panorama.com.al, shqiptarja.com and albeu .com. An empirical research was undertaken to explore trends, features and specific traits of multimediaility, consisting of a monitoring of these online media for a period of one year from November 2013 to November 2014. The selection of the above six websites is made based on several criteria like: their presence in the top-ten list of most visited news websites in Albania, (according to the ranking of the statistical engine Alexa - www.alex.com), the originality of the content, the representation of the various categories of the news websites, as well as the inclusion in the scope of the study of the website with faster growth and more advanced approach regarding multimediaility (such as shqiptarja.com).

Based on the theoretical literature, this paper studies the multimediaility of the Albanian news websites in two levels: At first are considered separately multimedia elements that apply to news

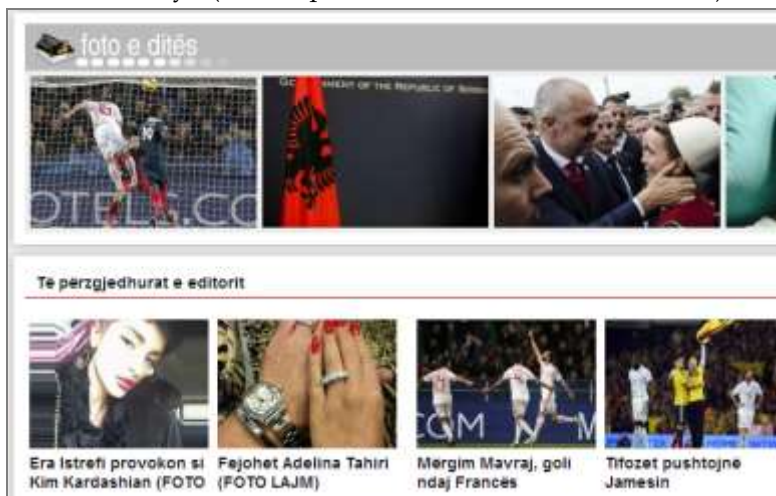
reporting. Thus, making a kind of deconstruction of the concept of multi-media, this paper analyzes the use and presence of photographs, infographics, animations, video and audio as separate multimedia elements. Later, in another plan these multimedia elements are viewed as part of the "multimedia storytellingpackage" used to report news on the web.

The use of pictures

It is fact that in the web environment, the use of pictures has experienced a new increase. The power of the image and the particular trend of web users towards visual information have made the Albanian websites to seriously consider the use of photography. The monitoring of six main Albanian news websites shows that regarding the use of photographic material there are different approaches from one online media to the other. Except panorama.com.al, all of the monitored media have created a special menu for the photography in their homepage. Balkanweb.com, albeu.com, shqiptarja.com and shekulli.com.al have also the "Photogallery" section. Shqiptarja.com groups the photos into three sections: Actuality, Sports and Thash&Them. Albeu.com has grouped the photos in the following sections: News-photo, Showbiz, Sports, Auto, Curiosities, Cities, Science & Technology and Tourism& Nature. In contrast to these, shekulli.com.al has only a Photo gallerypage, where are found a mixed of photographs, including those from the nature and the animal world as well as artistic photos, mostly taken from the Internet. The photos in this gallery are not labeled and are not divided into albums.

Like for all kinds of information in online media, the use of interactive options related to photography, is of a particular importance. But in the case of photography, Albanian websites are showing a notable hesitation. Only shqiptarja.com among six monitored websites has the option "Most viewed" for pictures and only albeu.com marks the number of views for each of the photos. In addition, within the photo page albeu.com separates the photos in

sections like: "Selected by the editor", "Latest from this category" and "Photo of the Day". (See the print-screen below from albeu.com)



As for the option "Like" next to the pictures, this is applied only by albeu.com and shqiptarja.com. While the attribute "Share" for the pictures, aside from these two media, is applied also by balkanweb.com. There is also a little use of the commenting option for the photography. Regarding the search options, only balkanweb.com provides a search opportunity for the pictures, offering a key-word based web search inside the website.

Lately, some of the best western websites are using narrative text offered by the photographer and placed under the photographs or next to them. Vivid description of how the photographer reaches a crucial moment enhances significantly image capability to connect the audience with the described events. Regarding the Albanian monitored websites, only three of them, respectively, albeu.com, balkanweb.com and shqiptarja.com use text next to the pictures. Although the accompanying text often is not offered by photographers, but by the editors, this technique reinforces the message conveyed by the photograph.

In addition to written narrative text, some Western online media like *the New York Times* apply audio narration offered by the photographer and placed next to every picture in his photo galleries.

The narrative audio helps to shorten the distance between the picture and its viewers and somehow enhances intimacy between them. But in the case of Albanian websites, the use of such a practice has yet to be found.

A permanent and constant characteristic of the best western websites is also highlighting the individual contribution of the photographer. For example, all photo galleries of The Guardian hold the name of the photographer who created them. In the case of Albanian websites, as indicated by monitoring, the displaying of the author's name is almost missing. Even when identified, mostly is identified the name of the photographic agency more than the name of the author of photography.

A serious problem for the Albanian online media remains the disregard of the copyright rules in the field of photography. In many cases, especially when it comes to news from the world, pictures are taken from the Internet without marking the source or the author of the photo.

The use of infographics and animations

Possessing new capacities and opportunities, the journalism developed in the web, has revived a special form of journalism, known as data journalism. In this context, scholars and professionals are talking more and more about the practice of data visualization through infographics which are being used successfully by online media and are further developing what is known as "graphic journalism". The visualization of the information and its presentation through image capacities, goes along with the logic of "graphic thinking" promoted by Mario Garcia¹ and is in line with "writing for visual effect" in the web environment, promoted by James Glen Stovall (Stovall, 2004 : 82).

The Albanian online media practice of presenting the data and information through infographics is only in its early stages. In those

¹ Cited in: Moen, Daryl. *Newspaper Layout and Design: A Team Approach*, 3rd ed. Iowa State University Press, 1995

cases where this practice occurs, it is limited to the presentation of data through graphics similar to Excel charts, as you can see in the following case from shekulli.com.al where the revenue growth of Albpetrolcompany is presented graphically. In this case, the text next to the infographic is a kind of repetition of the data displayed in the infographic. But, in the best of their examples, the infographic products stand on its own, without the need of explanatory texts.



Print-screen from shekulli.com.al, date 10.11.2014

In another case shekulli.com.al applies data visualization through "map journalism", where the information that has to do with membership of European countries to NATO is displayed through a graphic map. Map journalism creates great opportunities for the visualization of data and information. But the monitoring shows that this kind of graphic journalism is rarely used by Albanian online media. The application and expansion of data visualization through

infographics or through map journalism depends on a number of factors, such as the knowledge and the vision of media managers and their coping with new developments in the field of journalism on the web, the knowledge that journalists and reporters have, the human resource capacities and the organization possibilities to fund staff training, etc.

Animations are also an important part of the multimedia. Among online animations, a wide use in Albanian websites is having a technique known as "news slider", where the titles of articles or even the entire package of articles on the homepage with the title, picture and introductory text are presented through animation. Regarding the use of animations, the biggest problem remains their limited use for the purposes of news and its excessive use for countless online ads.

The use of video and audio

In general, in Albanian online media, the capacities and the options for the video are more numerous than those of photography. Thus, all of the six monitored online media have a separate page for videos. The access to these pages from the homepage is made possible through the video menu or through the video gallery section. Balkanweb.com names its video page Balkanweb TV. Shekulli.com.al names it ShTV while top-channel.tv names it simply Web TV.



Some online media signal the presence of the video in homepage through putting next to the title of the news article an icon or graphic representing video or writing in brackets the word "VIDEO". This practice is a step towards the identification of multimedia news package that contain not only text but also video or other integrated multimedia elements.

Panorama.com.al, in its homepage shows the four most recent videos in chronological order, while albeu.com provides the section

"The latest in this category". In most of the monitored websites, there are available also options "Like" and "Share" and the sections of video commentary. As in the case of photos, balkanweb.com and albeu.com applies the accompanying of videos with a short narration text or additional explanations.

Users are also helped through the search options for videos. In the video page of balkanweb.com there is a section called "Search in archive". The search is offered by the category where the video belongs, by the date published, the title and the news text accompanying the video. Aside from balkanweb.com, none of the other monitored websites have search options for videos.

One of the most debated cases in theoretical literature related to the video content of online media is the fraction between the new content and the repurposed one (Deuze, 2003; Kawamoto, 2003, etc.). Despite the growing interest in the originality and innovation of digital videos on the web, the empirical research undertaken in the framework of this study shows that the presence of the original video created specifically for the Web (that is not taken by any traditional media) is very scarce. The "*digital born*" videos rarely appear on the Albanian websites. Not only the websites of the TV channels, like top-channel.tv, but the other websites as well, are specifically based on TV channel content or on videos taken from the internet. Thus, the majority of the videos found in balkanweb.com are videos taken from the News 24 TV channel, which is a property of the same company that also owns balkanweb.com. The same applies to shqiptarja.com, where the videos are mostly products of the A1 Report TV channel. But also to shekulli.com.al, albeu.com or panorama.com.al, which are not related to any television media, most of the videos are taken from different foreign or local TV channel websites.

Meanwhile, another source for videos is the Internet itself. Most viewed videos on YouTube and social networks, be they news video or simply entertainment video, make their tour in the Albanian news websites too. In the case of shekulli.com.al, albeu.com and panorama.com.al, most of the video material comes from this source.

Nonetheless, the experiences to create a video specifically produced for the Web are not lacking in Albanian websites. As an

example we can mention a case from shekulli.com.al during the reporting of the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama visit in Serbia on November 10th 2014. Situated at the scene of the events and meetings, the correspondent of this news outlet, was shooting instant videos and uploading them immediately on the website through the YouTube. As you can see in the picture below, in the corner of the video image is placed a small photo of the journalist who shot the video, and if you bring the mouse over the photo, his name appears. (see the print-screen below).



In such a practice, the reporter located at the event makes possible the production of the original web video and the website applies the recognition of personal contribution of the reporter through placing of his photo and his name in the corner of the video image.

As another example of a video created specifically for the Web, we can also mention the case of panorama.com.al while reporting a student protest in front of government offices, where the original video comes coupled with the panorama.com.al logo. Shqiptarja.com, albeu.com, and balkanweb.com have examples of the creation of the original web videos as well.

But, in an overall assessment, this practice is sporadic, occasional and not as a usual part of daily online news reporting. Videos created by the staff of Albanian news websites are generally YouTube style videos, mostly created in a non-formal style. Part of them is not edited

in video-editing programs and is uploaded directly from mobile phones or from other digital equipment.

After the transition into the phase 2.0, the Web created also huge opportunities for live broadcasting of an event, a practice which is internationally known as live-streaming. But even though the live-streaming during reporting the latest news is getting wider use in western websites, this practice has yet to be used in Albanian online media. Live-streaming is applied mainly for live-broadcasting of the TV channel programs and never for live reporting of the events in the media website.

Regarding the coverage or reporting of events through audio, such practice is found very rarely in the Albanian news websites. In the cases applied, audio coverage mainly deals with interviews with witnesses present on the scene (shqiptarja.com) or interviews with persons related to the event. Mimicking the Western websites model, some Albanian websites have added among other sections a menu section called "Podcasting". Thus, in 2009 shekulli.com.al provided such a menu (see figure on the side) but that did not work and with the new design of this website it is no longer present. The general conclusion resulting from the monitoring is that the audio materials are very scarce in the Albanian online media.



The use of "multimedia storytelling" and multimedia packages

In the above analysis, we looked at "multimediality" of major news websites doing the deconstruction of the concept of "multi-media" in its constituent elements, such as photos, infographics, animation, video and audio. In this part of the analysis will focus on the integration of these multimedia elements. In theoretical discussions about this integration (Zerba, 2004; Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2004; Thurman & Lupton, 2008) the use of multimedia in online journalism

has advanced towards the multimedia package concept applied in reporting of a story, which includes a host of interactive attributes.

The monitoring conducted in six major news websites in Albania, shows that, in contrast to Western media, Albanian online media represent a weaker integration of various multimedia elements. The qualitative analysis within this paper proves also that, the multimedia used in Albanian websites contributes a little to the improvement of storytelling and for upgrading of news reporting into a higher level. Along with the text, Albanian websites offer a large number of multimedia elements, but only a very small part of them result to form a multimedia package that facilitates or enriches the multimedia experience of the user, according to Zerba's concept of "multimedia package" (Zerba, 2004).

A closer examination of the reality of the monitored Albanian websites reveals rare cases of an integrated multimedia content according to this concept. Multimedia elements that are used, usually fail to meet their effective role as complementary to the story of the event. Moreover, there are many cases where multimedia elements simply and only repeats what is written in the text. This happens with most of the news received from TV channels, where the written text of the news and the spoken one are the same.

The practice of reporting through integrated multimedia package actually represents the highest level of multimediality of a website and reflects the maximum use of web capacity in this regard. Although on Albanian websites, there are a few cases where media follow this kind of reporting, still it is worth that these cases be promoted and encouraged. One of the websites that distinguishes for its initiative to advance towards the concept of multimedia package is *shqiptarja.com*. Since the first year of the establishment, in this website we found the presence of "multimedia storytelling" and the tendency for an integration of multimedia elements according to the concept of multimedia package. Thus, the reporting on Himara student bus accident dated May 22, 2012, is made not only through text, but also through different videos, two audio materials and a photographic slide. In one of the videos, through 3D animations the accident scene is recreated and are given views of post-accident

developments. In another video that doesn't contain narration are shown other plans from the accident scene. Audio comes with an interview of a survived student. The information conveyed through multimedia elements is not repeating what is said in the text or through other media.



**Himarë, 13 studentë të vdekur
11 vajza e dy djem**

HIMARË/TIRANË – Nje autobus me studentë të Universitetit Aleksander Xhuvani është rrezuar pranë vendit të quajtur Ura e Vishës në afërsi të Himarës. Ngjarja ndodhi dje, 21 maj, rreth orës 16:15. Nga aksidenti i rëndë humbën jetë 13 persona: 11 vajza dhe 2 meshkuj, mes të cilëve edhe shoferi i autobusit. Behet fjalë për një grup prej 33 studentësh, të cilët udhëtonin nga Saranda në një autobus me targa të Elbasanit. Dëshmitarët në vendngjarje thonë se mjeti ka rënë nga një lartësi prej 80 metra.

ORA 02:19- IDENTIFIKOHEN TE GJITHA VIKTIMAT E AKSIDENTIT NE HIMARE

Janë identifikuar të gjitha viktimat që ndodhen në morgun e qytetit të Vlorës dhe spitalin Ushtarak të Tiranës pas aksidentit të rëndë që ndodhi në aksin rugorë Vlorë-Himarë. Viktimat të identifikuara nga familjarët dhe shokët janë si më poshtë: Juliana Tola nga Elbasani, Elsa Draka nga Elbasani, Armand Halllaga nga Kavaja, Denisa Guzi nga Gramshi, Fabiola Shehi nga Tirana, Ermira Mana nga Elbasani, Lindita Kabashi nga Elbasani, Joana Debinja nga Lushnja, Eriola Xhoi nga Elbasani, Aurora Molla nga Pogradeci, Pëllumb Cela nga Elbasani, Doriana Stafa nga Kruja dhe Eranda Baloshi nga Elbasani. Ndërsa, Kaltra Pollozhani, Alma Deda, Eranda Bato, Antoneta Tasa, Doriana Kumra, Anisa Cobaj, Shqirbe Haka, Elza

Të tjera rreth shkrimit

- FOTO- Nga aksidenti
- VIDEO EKSKLUZIVE: Tragjedia në Himarë
- FOTO - Të plagosurit |
- AUDIO - Dëshmitari
- Shoferi një ish basketbollist. Studentët ishte i qetë
- FOTO - Lot e qirinj në Universitetin "A. Xhuvani"
- Aksidenti tragjik në Himarë

Print-screen from shqiptarja.com, date 22.05.2012

Fulfilling the criteria of an integrated multimedia package, this report can be considered as one of the first examples of genuine online multimedia storytelling in Albanian journalism.

Despite these sporadic cases, we may conclude that multimodality developed in Albanian online journalism remains more in the form of superficial multimodality, being far from the model of integration and from genuine multimedia reporting. Viewing multimedia as "multiple media", Albanian online media have provided a satisfactory presence of different communication modalities, such as text, video, audio, animation, etc. But genuine multimodality in online journalism means not simply a presence of different modalities in the news website, but also an integration of them to produce a full multimedia report.

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