

Performance features of the Albanian speaking web radios

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Abstract

Albanian speaking internet radios is the media units, that about a decade ago have eliminated state borders, have exceeded the limits that newsrooms have for the expansion of the transmission frequency and coverage zone, becoming accessible on any of the points of the globe where Albanians live and work. Opening an online radio solution is not only driven by the lack of frequencies for wireless transmissions, or reaction against the effects of economic crisis, but it is also in synchrony with the technological developments in the media industry and expansion of the internet in a wide scale.

Internet radios promote decentralization in the broadcasting market and with the trend of 3G and 4G standards they come more and more to the features a radio like the others available since smart phones started existing, without having the need to be equipped with a dedicated receiver - one of the problems with the economic and financial features that has slowed down the process of transition from analog broadcasting to digital audio.

Radio newsrooms are becoming more and more in favor of the dual access to their products; in the classic version, as well as through online services in the virtual space. This is a forced relocation of many factors inside and outside the premises of the radio station, technological momentum on one of the aspect, increasingly large infiltration of the internet or the limitless race performed by the telecommunication industry with the numerous offers of the mobile telephony and on the other, associated with the above, is the pressure that comes from the modification of the audience behavior. Considering that the media customer "delves" more to informative and entertaining content on the virtual space, then the radio owners and managers maneuver by serving a portion of the product in the online format. According to David Hendy, internet radio presence creates a new dimension, since its audience from local becomes global. "This offers radio companies the chance to build a global presence and in some cases perhaps a global brand".¹

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¹ David Hendy, *Radio in the global age*, UK; Polity Press 2000, page 57.

This paper has in its focus the main aspects of the performance in the flow of the Albanian speaking online radios, type of the content broadcasted, information and entertaining columns, the degree of interactivity with the followers and multimedia offerings in the virtual space. In addition to the most encountered formats, it is also treated the legislation for audio broadcasting in Albania, as well as changes to improve the online radio market regulation.

Introduction

With the application of online services, radio doesn't only "break" the limits deriving from the definition of the coverage area in the transmission frequency spectrum, but also brings another impact related to the dimensioning of the concept of the "listener", considering him/her more as a "follower". An audience that is modified in its content composition, from "aggregate listeners", as until nearly two decades, to "aggregate followers" who are able not only to hear, but to also see the offers of the multimedia station and to interact.

The process of transition from analogue broadcasting to digital radio is not going with the planned momentum, mainly from the influence of the car manufacturing industry, that cannot comply with the inflated list of enormous costs for converting radio receivers to automobiles. Flow of the high cost standard HD receivers with the broadcasted content, according to Joseph Dominick, create problems in the market. "Portable HD receivers have a problem, HD radios spend so much power, as the batteries wear out more quickly. Furthermore, digital radio so far hasn't brought any radical changes. They simply offer the same content, but with a better quality audio. Wouldn't this be sufficient for the iPod and satellite services thrilled listeners? Most experts preach that if the recipient's costs will continue to drop and if radio will provide more renewed content, chances are good for the absolute success of HD radio"².

² Joseph R. Dominick, *Dinamika e komunikimit masiv. Media ne periudhen digjitale*, Tirana; UET Press, 2010, page 254.

This is the dynamic and the destiny of the radios that launched the broadcasting with the classic status, linear, on air. Their adaption to the new circumstances in the market. But viewed from this angle, the area of action remains tight. The limited number of frequencies in the analogue transmission, and the direct and indirect strikes the economic crisis has given - as anywhere, so as in the regional media market too, be it national or global - has pushed the audio people to approach to more practical and profitable solutions, by creating the internet radios, or as often called Web radio, which are too designed for and operate only online.

For Hugh Chignell, alternative online radio orientation is a solution that appeals not only to public and private broadcasters, but also to those who have very limited resources, as the amateur enthusiasts can be who can install the Web radio in their bedroom with very little cost and without caring too much about the instruments of the state regulatory. As much as he goes to a not quite merely suggestive question that is: "We returned to the world of pre-broadcasting times, wherein amateurs used make the law?"³

Indicators of content emissions through internet

Web radio has fundamental differences from a digital radio, in the classical sense that we know of. Amongst them we might mention:

-The concept *signal coverage area* turns into access to follow. If the first one is limited by the technological point of view and the stations must always compete to acquire a frequency and to comply with that under the license conditions, as awarded by the Regulatory Authority, the second concept implies the lack of space limits, provided one has a computer or a similar appliance to that, as well as internet access. The usage quality and the inventory settings directly affect the download speed and that of the transfer of various content offered by the online radio and the hearing quality of the broadcasted programs.

³ Hugh Chignell, *Key Concept in radio Studies*, London: SAGE Publication, Ltd. 2009, page 12.

-*Geographic factor*, localization or newsroom whereabouts. In analogue broadcasting, the localization of the editorial office, the team that manages and attains the product, is usually within the site covered by the signal, except in the case of satellite broadcasting. The management or the product attaining staff address of the online radio, can be anywhere, suffice that a set of necessary appliances is installed, such as servers, software, computers, and so on, an internet line as sought, or a wireless connection instead. For example, the first ever Albanian speaking online radio, "Emigranti", works as a "joint-venture" between the teams in France and USA.

-*The offer on non-linear or program upon request*. Linearity of on air broadcasting of programs puts the follower in "awaiting" position to listen the what one wishes, pursuant to the schedule that the transmitter has made on the content. Whereas in a web radio one can choose as one wishes, and one can consume at any time as self planned, moreover through "time-shift", a program, a chronicle, a desired interview etc., one can follow that sequence of interest, maneuvering the movements of the on-screen cursor with the commands "forward", "rewind" or "stop".

-*The enhancement of the archive deposit*. Multi story shelves of spoken and music archive, are converted and compressed through digital techniques into formats that take up a small space, creating opportunities for them to be filed according to the relevant theme, author and time on the server's memory. There is an ease of creating and transferring the archived material, that can be then exploited in every moment during transmission, or for the preparation of the new contributions.

The Albanian speaking internet broadcasting typology

In the globalist concept of "stateless activity " Albanian speaking internet radios have their transmission routes not only from Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Presheva Valley, but also from the states where there is a concentration of immigration, such as Germany, Switzerland, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, France, Austria, Sweden, USA, Australia, Canada etc. Their beginnings date

back by the end of 2004, as initiatives of passionate amateurs, who experimented with the online audio services. The vanguard in The Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland, were from the new generation immigrants, more as in hobbyists position in their activity, enchanted by the adventures to own virtual spaces with spontaneous targets without sufficient journalistic experience, that reflected in a poor product, as simple as an Albanian music play-list downloaded from all sorts of known or unknown sites.

The first phase of online audio broadcasting, 2004-2005, can be characterized as the experimental period, in the "one man-one radio" format " without a designated program, with a low level of advertising and commercial space exploitation, features that affected the limited length of activity duration, only a few of months.

Establishment of Radio "Emigranti" on July 20, 2006, scores an important moment of Albanian speaking web radios. As an initiative conceived in the US and in France, "Emigranti" is still on air, as a highly frequented station of Albanians who live and work outside their home. "Born abroad, in immigration, responded to a specific need of the immigrants, to hear Albanian speak Albanian, to contact virtually, ignoring boundaries and distances. Albanian immigrants work and live in different countries of the world, an Internet radio seemed the most appropriate to reach to each and every one of them. With a radio initiative in the classic wave sense this mission would have been difficult, complicated"⁴.

For the managers of "Emigranti", an online radio is interactive and thanks to the use of new technologies and social media, a quick and efficient communication with the listeners is enabled. "The other reason relates in favor of the online version, is the costs that are lower than in the case of maintaining a station in the classic version, making it easier to transform the idea into reality, thanks to the opportunities provided today by the new communication technologies"⁵ \

Another well-known web radio is "Radio Pulla", based in the city of Shkodra, that started broadcasting on 21st November 2010.

⁴ Xhemil Meco, co-founder of the Radio Emigranti, interview to the author on September 4, 2013

⁵ *ibid*

Innovation in its content was the priority for the organization of the forums with social themes, as well as building a stable structure of journalists and associates engaged in implementing both conversational and musical programs. *Tirana Jazz Radio* started broadcasting on the internet on April 1, 2011, entering the market as a profiled station, dedicated to the performance of jazz stars, illustrated with texts summarizing the history and actuality of this musical genre. In the virtual space, in early 2012 appeared for the first time a flux of web radios from the same station. Club FM radio launched on the Internet five of its music channels: Club Romance, Club Party, Disco Club, English Club and Club National.

The flow of online radios with religious content, especially from Macedonia, Kosovo, Switzerland etc., was increased after 2010.

An internet search⁶ on 22-26 August 2014 resulted to 162 broadcasting Albanian speaking web radios, designed in various accessible formats, such as to follow and to interact with the staff. What was specifically noted by the research on the broadcast content was the fact that about 80% of the stations were based to folk songs and melodies archive, in all of its genres, creation and professionally processed or remastered and commercialized, by all regions of the country.

Their programming in the "play-list" format is implemented by the final choice that was supported by the selection on a geographic basis and by musical genre the staff has made, or by the online requests made by the online followers. 34 of the Albanian speaking web radios on the internet (20% of total) regarded the informative content as well, not very updated though, that was reflected in special sections of the websites, in the form of news and illustrative pictures. Only 11 web radios prepared news programs with speakers, but only in the news format, without applying other types, such as chronicles, field reports, reports, vox-pop, etc. Meanwhile that live conversational programs with the guests, or based on telephone contacts with followers were broadcasted evenings.

⁶ Implemented by the author in the framework of the process of drafting the PhD thesis *Radio in the Albanian media landscape. Problems and perspectives*.

Albanian speaking internet radios are grouped in several global platforms of online radios, that are state or language-based divided. There are optional downloads of favorite listening programs for visitors, in case the computer or the digital device is not compatible with the broadcasting format.

Through typing in the known search engines of key words "radio shqip ne internet", "Albanian web radio", or another combination of the phrase "online radio", one is enabled the option of multiple lists of stations, and through the identifying icons one can learn as to whether or not they are in operating conditions at the time of the search. (These lists automatically include some wavelength radios that offer simultaneously online services too). Besides the names of the stations you have the possibility of getting hold of their accurate address on the internet, and part of them contains info on their activities, programs, staff, editor contacts etc.

Obtaining authorization for online audio program service

By adopting on March 4, 2013 of the Law 97/2013, "On the audiovisual media in the Republic of Albania", the parliament specified a sequence of procedures on web radio activity, introducing the Authority on audiovisual media, AMA, that as a regulatory institution by drawing up sub-legal acts in this space would affect this relatively new area of the broadcasting market. It is yet early to provide any estimates as to how much and how did the legal framework affected the formalization of the earlier created online radio flux, however the guidelines the owners and managers should stick to, is those of the EU standards, as in the case where the applicants have the "physical entity" legal status, as well as when they operate as "legal entity"

AMA's role is to duly provide any interested party with an authorization that is "Authorization of the online service audio program, for providing audio service". There is no competing for obtaining this type of authorization as in the case of licensing, but a range of requirements that are part of the application package, have to be necessarily accomplished, as they include:

- name, location, the decision of the National Registry Center, NRC, for the inclusion in the register of businesses;

- documents certifying official bank data on the finances of the applying legal entity or physical one making the request;

- name of the program and supporting network;

- object and general features of the service, information about the duration of the program and the area coverage, as well as the technical design of the installation and use of the equipment;

- list of administrators, forecasts of costs and revenues, the origin and the amount of funding provided for the duration of the requested authorization;

- list of names of the members of the board of directors (no less than 5 members) and their CVs too;

- content of programs to be broadcasted and the programming structure proposed for broadcasting, which clearly demonstrate pluralism in their entirety and impartiality of information;

- information on the ownership structure of the company and of its shareholders;

- bank guarantee document, certifying the deposit of 10% of the required capital

According to the proceeding, bank guarantee is no longer required in cases where the subject has begun providing the service and has made the annual payment. If the applicant does not start providing the service, and does not perform the annual payment, as determined pursuant to the terms, the bank guarantee is confiscated by the Regulatory Authority for the unpaid dues; whereas the remainder is made available at the activated account. The amount of the required capital of the applying entity for online audio services should be the no less than 5 million ALL, according to the declaration that is deposited in the NRC, or on a basis of the verification released by the certified accountant.

All documents, in their original or notarized ones, plus statements - constituting the application for the authorization of the service taking online audio program - are reviewed by the AMA, meanwhile in this intermediary stage, the applying entity must answer any query for any information or clarification on the submitted application There

is a 30-day deadline for reviewing of an application, from the date of its filing with the AMA by post or handover. If this institution will not respond within the said deadline, then the authorization shall be deemed approved.

Timeframe for commissioning a service online audio is the valid for 5 years. After this period if the entity wishes to go on with the activity, it should start the proceedings to renew the license with AMA. An online radio activity, according to law 97/2013, is within the philosophy of the audiovisual broadcasting in Albania, while maintaining the basic principles of:

- guaranteeing the freedom of expression's and that of the right to information;
- maintaining the secrecy of the sources of information;
- respecting and ensuring the preservation of privacy;
- disallowing the broadcasts that promote intolerance amongst citizens, that promoting or justifying violence;
- guaranteeing the right to answer;
- guaranteeing of the copyright and other rights related to it
- respecting of good neighborly;
- literary respecting of the Albanian language.

Conclusions

Opening an online radio is a solution that is fueled by the lack of frequencies for wireless transmissions, as well as a reaction against the effects of the economic crisis. They are in synchrony with technological developments in media and broadcasting industry on the internet and expansion in a lengthy scale. Internet radio presence creates a new dimension, since its audience from local becomes global. -The beginnings of Albanian speaking web radios date back at the end of 2004, moreover as initiatives of passionate amateurs from the new generation immigrants with spontaneous targets without sufficient journalistic experience that reflected in a poor product, just as-an Albanian music play-list.

-About 80% of the stations is based on the folk songs and melodies archive, in all its genres, creations and professional processing, or commercialized ones from all regions. The remainder, about 20% of total cares for information content too, not much updated though, that is reflected in special sections of the websites, in the form of news and illustrative pictures. Evenings usually are broadcasted live conversational programs with guests, or other ones based on telephone contacts with the followers.

-With the adoption of March 4, 2013 of the Law 97/2013, "On the audiovisual media in the Republic of Albania", the parliament has clarified a sequence of procedures for web radio activity, introducing a Regulatory Authority that by drawing up as regulatory institution, sub-legal acts regarding this space, will affect this relatively new area of the broadcasting market

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