



The Role of Technology in Travel Journalism: The Albanian Case

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Abstract

Digitalization has affected the specialization of travel journalism, but has brought opportunities and many new challenges. Travel journalism is now everywhere, with multimedia capabilities, personalization, interactivity, hypertext stories, virtuality, etc. The role of technology has already broken-down the traditional media monopoly, as the ability of Web 2.0 has enabled anyone to give rise to a customized media, create and distribute content, where travel journalists now thanks to different platforms allow users and travelers to plan trips, share their experiences instantly with a wide audience and react to stories published by others. In this article will examine how this genre is developing in Albania, specifically because our country is experiencing a touristic boom, but also thanks to the technology development. It will be perceived how tourism has re-dimensioned and updated this journalistic genre, through qualitative interviews of actors in the field, where through them will get to know the challenges and perspectives.

Keywords: Travel journalism, blog, reels, networking, marketing

1. Introduction

Journalism is a rapidly changing profession in the age of information and technology. In this context, an obvious trend in the journalism field is the growing interest and importance of travel journalism. This type of journalism offers a unique perspective of the world and travel experiences, taking readers on an incredible journey of cultures, destinations and adventures. In a world where travel is increasingly accessible and information is available at all times, travel journalism has gained enormous importance. People are drawn to travel stories and experiences, and journalists have found an effective way to express and share these stories with a wide audience.

The digital revolution has transformed the media landscape and travel journalism has adapted accordingly. Online platforms, social media and multimedia storytelling have expanded the reach and immediacy of travel reporting (Lugo-Ocando & Ramirez-Polo, 2020). Understanding these changes is essential for both journalists and consumers of travel content. The exploration of travel journalism also highlights the need for diversity and inclusion in the field. Diverse voices and perspectives contribute to a richer portrayal of travel experiences and ensure that underrepresented groups can tell their stories (Broussard & Lee, 2019).

2. The Theoretical Approach

Travel journalism has received a lot of attention thanks to the role of new technologies, because there is a growing interest from the audience in obtaining information on this field. This great attention has come thanks to digital platforms or new media for the information transmission on the tourism sector. Belenguer (2002), argues that travel journalism has now become a specialized field, despite skepticism that it represents genuine journalism. Following it, he states that the

specialization came to him thanks to the variety of platforms available for its publication, as well as the number of genres with which it can be presented. González-Rivera (2019) describes travel journalism as the "antithesis" of advertising, because according to him it can be defined as a journalistic specialization with a long tradition, performed through different genres and multiple channels, that meets a wide range of objectives.

Digitalization has influenced the specialization of travel journalism, but has brought opportunities and many new challenges. Travel journalism is now everywhere, with multimedia capabilities, customization, interactivity, hypertext stories, encyclopedic skills and virtuality. (Tejedor & Larrondo, 2008). Moreover, in addition to the connection and the different options offered by technology, there is an impact on the audience because already with the digitization of travel journalism, the habits of readers have changed, which now prioritize faster access, shorter and more concise visual information, a variety of sources compared to traditional media and who also want to participate in the communication process (Vartanova, 2019). The benefit of this journalism is that it reaches the audience in real time, with quality and concise information, it is quick and it is free of cost. The whole process has meant that readers in the field of travel journalism have a kind of leadership in this "boom" of diversified information (Paranko, 2016).

Social networks have the greatest impact on the tourism industry because they have influenced the creation of an interactive space between the audience/users and the journalist during the trip. (Dediu, (2016). One of the most widespread forms of travel journalism influenced by the role of technology is the Blog.

The Blog is a platform within Web 2.0, which enables ease of use, autonomy and proximity to the journalistic environment. As a result, user-generated content has become a key source of information for others, which has had a strong impact on their decisions (Lekant, & Palau-Sampio, 2022). To these factors is added the influence on purchasing decisions representing a significant volume of expenditure. The direct intervention of travellers in the communication process undermines the exclusive role of the expert and raises the question of the status of travel bloggers compared to travel journalists, two concepts with increasingly blurred boundaries. Authors like Pokazanyeva (2015) warn on the danger of equating bloggers with professional journalists, the latter having education and experience, pointing out that the professional travel journalist follows journalistic principles of providing information, respecting ethical standards and responsibility for the facts authenticity. The consequences of a false statement may be less harmful to bloggers, although they are not immune in terms of reputation or feedback comments. (Lekant& Palau-Sampio, 2022). In any case, amateur travel journalists have shaken the media's status as the only source of information, representing the greatest challenge for travel journalism as a profession. In fact, with the increase in free online content, the market for traditional travel magazines has shrunk over the last decade. The dual crisis involving the financial sphere and the business model affecting the media has not only caused the closure of some magazines, but also led traditional magazines to explore the possibilities offered by the Web, such as digital versions of their periodicals. (Lekant& Palau-Sampio,2022).

3. Technology and Travel Journalism in Albania

Travel journalism in Albania, or as professionals in this field prefer to call it 'reporting', seems to have gained ground and is receiving media attention. This trend is linked not only to the fact that our country is becoming potential from the point of view of tourism development, but also information technology plays a significant role in the actualization of this genre. The well-known publicist Ben Andoni states that "as far as the visual side of the reportage development is concerned, there is a leap unmatched by our times", but he is skeptical about the quality". Effects, drones, light cameras and above all the speed in reaching the targets thanks to technology make the reportage efforts more on the image than on the essence, so today we have many travelers who who strive for the image, but we know very little about the real Albania" (Andoni, 2024). Another well-known name in this field, Agim Pipa, states that: "Technology is today the image and sound of speech. We used to shoot with non-digital cameras. Today, thanks to the good technological conditions, we have left behind the large digital cameras and shoot with cameras of the highest quality, which help to convey the emotions and impressions of viewers while watching the reports". (Pipa, 2024) 'The technology has accelerated the time of gathering information, it is easier to find information", says Albana Hasanaj, host of the show program "Check In" on TV Klan, where according to her "you have to be very selective, know how to choose and confirm the correct data" (Hasanaj,2024). As for the publicist Gjergj Marku, who develops this kind of travel journalism especially in the North of Albania, he claims that technology has helped in doing his work well. In many cases it is possible to follow a live show, even by phone, and I have done this in quite a few cases. To make this possible, I studied well the terrain, the subject, the people and the rhythm of the show. On the other hand, quite a few times I may have done half the work in assembling up in the mountains (Marku, 2024). The author of the shows "Another Albania" and "Albanian Footprint", Marin Mema emphasizes that: "Today it is easier, because what we used to do by climbing in high areas, now it is realised by a drone. Even in

certain events we used to go on foot to touch them closely, today technology has shortened these parts. Actually I remain a fan of traditional journalism, which is more tiring but more satisfying. Technology is undoubtedly necessary, but it must not affect the journalist's relationship with the field. The journalist without ground is like a man without oxygen' (Mema, 2024).

Although technology has imposed its own rules on journalism, professionals in this field in our country must slowly embrace these developments, expressing that they prefer a more traditional journalism, since technology, according to them, is shifting the focus from the essence to image, to clickability and commerciality.

As in any other sector, this genre inevitably requires new dimensions of its development. In this part we will see how programs dedicated to "travel journalism" have been adapted to new forms of communication, such as blogs, short videos, reels, accounts on Tik Tok, Instagram, FB, etc.

Table no. 1: Shows that have been analyzed

TV	The name of the show	The journalist	Broadcasting
Klan	Albanian history	Alma Cupi	Weekly
Klan	Check-in	Albana Hasanaj	Seasonal
Euro news	Downtown	Ilnisa Agolli	Weekly

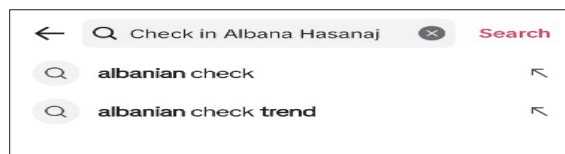
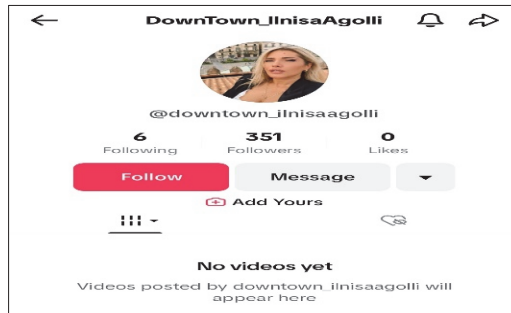
The three aforementioned shows were monitored on 10 shows for each, a random selection from which we we aim to observe these parameters:

- In what ways do these shows communicate with their audience, favored by technology? They use dedicated channels, that is, what are their social networks, such as Tik Tok, Instagram, reels, FB, blogs, etc. Or is simply the content that is broadcast on TV also thrown on the net, on YouTube? Do they create opportunities for interactivity with their online audience and what percentage of audiences is followed?
- Which genres do they use most, interviews, reports, vox pop, news? Or do they communicate in short forms, such as a few-second video, photographs, reels?
- Who are the actors who speak, the journalists themselves, the travel agencies, the ordinary people?
- What is the percentage of sponsored shows? What is the promotional, informative, positive approach?
- What are the themes, historical, cultural, tourist-geographical, informative and personal achievements?

Table no. 2: Content analysis

	Albanian history	Check in	Downtown
Social networks	FB-Yes Tiktok-Instagram, with the author's name	FB-No Tiktok-No Instagram-No	FB-No Tiktok-No Instagram-No
Actors	Residents of the area, Journalist Success characters	Residents of the area, Journalist	Residents of the area, Journalist
Content Sponsorship	There is not	Sometimes from tourist agencies in the summer season	There is not
Approach	Informative Promotional Positive	Informative Promotional Positive	Informative Promotional Positive
Genres	Interview, reportage	Interview, reportage	Interview, reportage
Interactivity	Average	There is not	There is not
Topics	Tourism, characters, history	Tourism, history	History, culture, tourism
Area	Albania	Abroad	Abroad

From the above, the content of these shows that is produced for the screen is transmitted identically on the YouTube channel, without adapting to the short forms of the network, such as reels, short videos, etc, new approaches that technology requires. This also reduces interactivity. There is no dedicated online account with the name of the show, but the authors promote the reports through their personal accounts. "Albanian History" on Tik Tok has no dedicated account, but is under the name of the author Alma Çupi, there are 90K followers. While the other two shows are almost non-existent.



The head of "Check-in", on TV Klan, Albana Hasanaj says that she is not in favor of social networks and that her program has a high audience, especially dedicated to television audiences (Hasanaj, 2024).

4. Conclusions

In summary, travel journalism, a vibrant and evolving field, will face transformative changes in the coming years. The digital revolution, changing consumer preferences and global challenges have significantly reshaped the travel journalism landscape. The digital age has already revolutionized travel journalism, offering both opportunities and challenges. In our country there are travel agencies that take on the role of 'travel journalists' and these actors are immediately adapted to the technology forms. Agencies communicate with short videos, blogs, photos, have Tik Tok accounts and are hyperactive in communicating with their audience. Agencies have assumed the role of travel journalists, disclosing information on tourist guides, but their online pages are rich in historical, cultural, tourist and promotional information for our country and everywhere in the world. Television is still the classic media that covers reporting in a classical way. The future will witness the further integration of digital technologies into the profession. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) will enable readers to immerse themselves in destinations before visiting them, enhancing the storytelling experience. Travel journalists will need to adapt to these technologies, mastering new storytelling techniques to engage technology-savvy audiences (Schäferhoff, 2019). In the local context in Albania, it seems that we are still far from embracing technology in the development of this genre, and the protagonists of the sector claim to be fanatics of deep journalism and not of superficial and fast journalism. In the future, customization will be the key. Readers will look for

tailored content that matches their specific interests and travel preferences. Travel journalists will need to embrace a niche specialization, addressing an audience looking for unique experiences, be it sustainable travel, culinary adventures or cultural immersion (Lew & Wong, 2020). Collaborations with local experts and influencers will become commonplace, enriching the depth and authenticity of travel stories.

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