THE MULTI-IDENTITY OF CONTENT SHARING PLATFORMS:
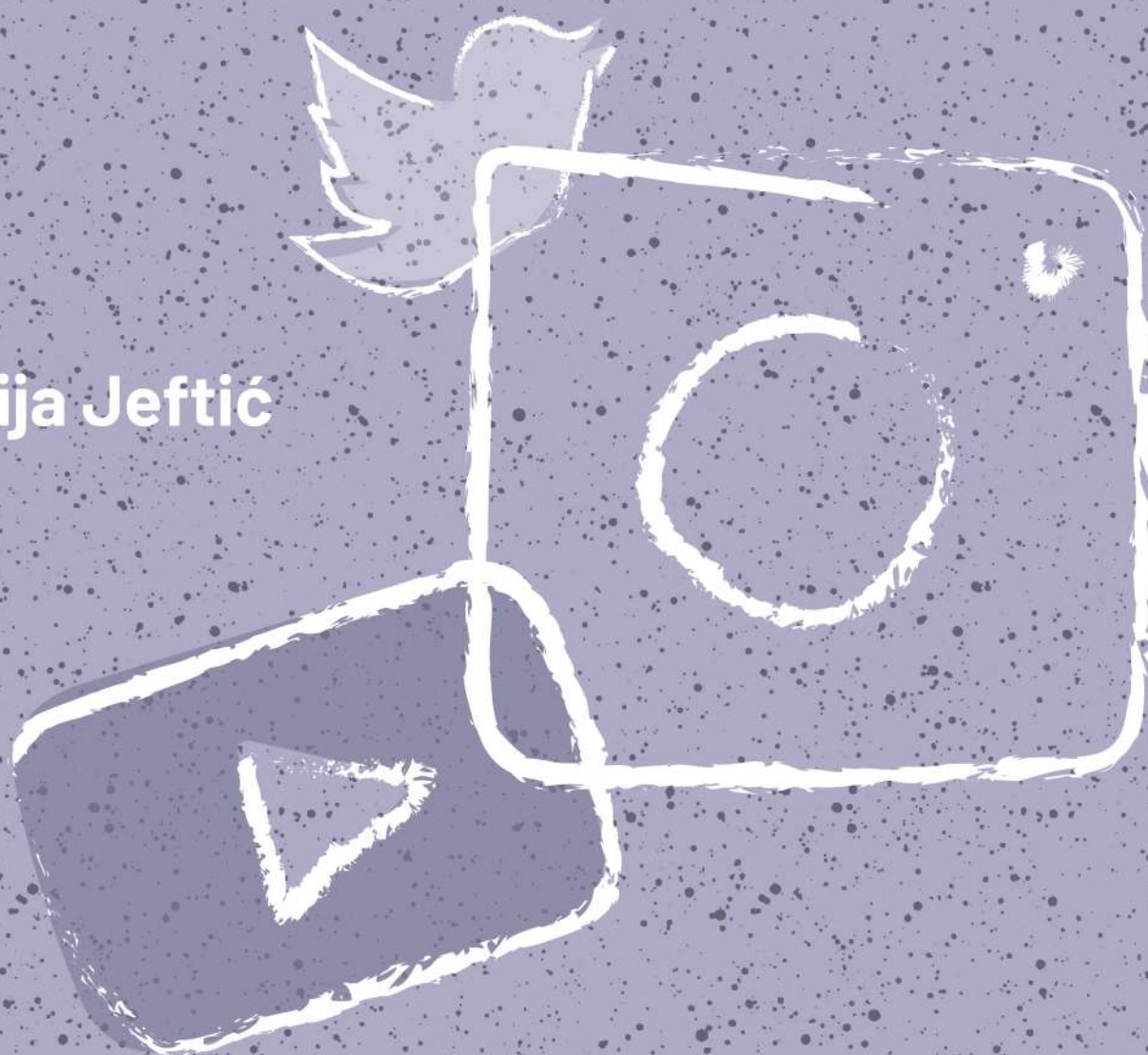## ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT CREATION PROCESS, BUSINESS ETHICS AND DSA IMPLEMENTATION

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THE MULTI-IDENTITY OF CONTENT SHARING PLATFORMS: ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT CREATION PROCESS, BUSINESS ETHICS AND DSA IMPLEMENTATION

CONTEXT, METHODOLOGY AND GOALS

The problem under consideration - the impact of global platforms on content creation, the transformation of information and cultural production, and consequently, the crucial issue of platforms' business ethics - unfolds in the digital environment, on the Internet. Since the media are not merely conveyors of reality but mediators as well[1], it can be stated that we live in a media-mediated world, and this problem affects all segments of the contemporary society functioning, which presupposes the intertwining of the digital and physical worlds.

The phenomenon being addressed has been expanding since the mid-2010s, and it entails platforms becoming increasingly involved in shaping the content they host and the way content is consumed and perceived, which fundamentally contradicts the definition and legal framework of platforms as information and communication technologies (ICT).

Platforms define the parameters for desirable and undesirable content through their Terms and Conditions policies (i.e., how topics should be treated, what can be displayed in what manner) while directing the audience and creating trends through algorithms (popular formats are replicated, and if the algorithm promotes them long enough, they often become a kind of genre).

The mechanism of platform operation inherently embodies the principle of soft power[2], given that the platform and its users (prosumers) share the same aspirations - attracting and maintaining an audience. The platform exercises its power through a balance of soft power mechanisms (Community Guidelines, comments, recommendations) and hard power mechanisms (video removal, usage bans and demonetization due to violations of Terms of Service and other rules derived from conditions), thus operating through the model of smart power[3].

Throughout this process, platforms operate solely based on the parameter of maximizing profit without engaging in an analysis of the effects of their actions or the ethics of their business operations.

As the main factors that have led to this phenomenon, to this significant strengthening of the influence of the privately-owned global platforms` policies on content creation in the digital

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[1] Čigoja Piper D., (2020) Kritičko mišljenje u digitlanoj eri: *Časopis Kultura* broj 169/2020, Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka (Critical Thinking in the Digital Era: Culture Journal No. 169/2020, Institute for the Study of Cultural Development), Belgrade

[2] Joseph Nye (2011, page 84) Soft power is defined as one's ability to lead other entities to desire the outcome they want, that is, achieving goals through attraction, not coercion.

[3] Joseph Nye (2011, page 84) Described the term "smart power" as a strategy of balancing between hard and soft power mechanisms, or using one or the other depending on the situation.

space, the following elements are recognized: digitization/digital transformation[4], the development of internet platforms, the liberalization of the media market, media transformation, the emergence of the prosumer model, (de)regulation of content in digital media, and the global nature of digital media.

"Digital technologies, the increasing use of mobile phones as media platforms, the proliferation of media content, and the redefinition of traditional roles of producers and consumers - audiences, are the frameworks of the new media landscape we are witnessing, along with the emergence of entirely new media forms."[5] The platforms completely transform positions, goals, work methods, roles, and most importantly, the power dynamics and responsibilities compared to all previous media forms.

The unpredictable emergence and development of internet technologies bring excitement and endless potential for positive effects but, at the same time, pose a significant challenge to content and behaviour direction and possible restrictions of the network activities. The predecessors of platforms, traditional and electronic media, were regulated by a series of laws of the state in which they operate and by supranational acts adopted in that state. Guided by the established cultural policies before the start of operation, they structured their actions based on predetermined frameworks. On the other hand, due to their global digital nature and primarily legal status as ICTs as well as due to their spontaneous global emergence and development, the content-sharing platforms have until recently managed to avoid the aforementioned regulations. With the introduction of the Digital Services Act (DSA) in the EU and the initiatives for similar regulatory frameworks in other environments, there is an opportunity for a better balance of responsibility and power. However, it should be noted that a large part of the world will not apply these measures to the platforms for at least some time (focusing on the USA market and the East and Southeast Asian markets that are both quantitatively and qualitatively of the highest importance for global circumstances).

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[4] For the purposes of this paper, digital transformation in a broader sense will encompass the process involving fundamental changes occurring in society and industry through the use of digital technologies. The definition is based on the research papers: Agarwal, R., Guodong, G., DesRoches, C., and Jha, A. K. (2010) The digital transformation of healthcare: Current status and the road ahead, *Information Systems Research* (21:4), page 796-809.; Majchrzak, A., Markus, M. L., & Wareham, J. (2016). Designing for digital transformation. *MIS quarterly*, 40(2), 267-278.

[5] Martinoli, A. (2016), *Medijske navike mladih-kako milenijalci menjaju medijski pejzaž*, Zbornik radova 29, Insititut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti (Media Habits of Young People - How Millennials are Changing the Media Landscape, Proceedings 29, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, Faculty of Dramatic Arts), Belgrade, page 198, 199

Platforms influence the opinions and behaviour of their users, directing them towards various content and shaping their habits in consuming products, content and communication. "The process in which media content is created is an important indicator of media philosophy and orientation - this aspect is increasingly determined by market issues, while public interest in carefully researched and fact-checked reporting is sidelined."[6] The number of users and the strength of influence that platforms wield indicate significant amounts of power in the hands of private entities, megacorporations that exceed their official activities and, without necessary regulations, gain this power.

The instruments that platforms use in content management are, analogously to the instruments of cultural policy: ideological (awards, community guidelines influence), economic (monetization), and in a broader sense also organizational (creator coordination) and legal-political (platform regulations). Accordingly, a large amount of power that was previously held by state infrastructure is now in the hands of private companies. Within a state that is regulated by a large number of elements through legislative, executive and judicial powers, each partaker of social life in that state is subject to actions taken by the state to protect the public good. Within a private company operating in a state or global system, the one where regulations do not keep pace with the current state of technology and the market, each partaker is motivated solely by generating profit for the private company, with no element other than profit.

In anticipation of the expected positive effects of the DSA implementation, the aim of this paper is to consider the causes of present issues and to understand their essence, rather than merely examining the forms in which they manifest. Namely, this paper aims to analyse the influence that platforms exert on their users as well as the responsibility accompanying that influence. In addition, its aim is to serve as one of the steps towards the adequate implementation of long-awaited regulations and as support for the initiatives to further develop and implement them on a global scale (conceptualizing individual legal provisions in countries outside the EU and, most importantly, selecting competent authorities for their enforcement).

The idea of this paper is to determine the scope, intensity and consequences of the influence by the platforms (legal entities and brands behind them) on users and creators (prosumers) in content production, as well as to identify the mechanisms that exert this influence. Inevitably, the

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[6] Čigoja Piper D., (2020) Kritičko mišljenje u digitlanoj eri: *Časopis Kultura* broj 169/2020, Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka (Critical Thinking in the Digital Era: Culture Journal No. 169/2020, Institute for the Study of Cultural Development), Belgrade, page 133

research focus is also on determining the extent of the responsibility that platforms bear for their actions. Firstly, the paper will examine the presumed multiple identities of platforms, which stand in contrast to their legal-business setup, as well as the implications of the platforms` influence mechanisms on content creation. Then, an overview of the current measures working towards market change and possible outcomes will be provided, along with a set of recommendations for consideration on implementing the DSA outside of the EU with a focus on the Western Balkans region.

Content-sharing platforms exhibit the characteristics of various entities; they are information and communication technology tools, media, editors, producers, and regulators, all at the same time. Platforms perform a wide range of functions (which are otherwise inherent in assumed identities), even though they officially do not interfere with the content found on them. They influence content by favouring certain content using algorithms as the main instrument, as well as through the Terms of Service and their set of policies and guidelines. Algorithms and Terms of Service influence creators' decisions as to what type of content to create and how to distribute it. On a global scale, the only regulation that platforms are subject to is the DSA, in the EU member countries, while the majority of the global market is still unregulated, meaning that platforms bear no responsibility or consequences for their ethically questionable actions.

THE MULTI-IDENTITY OF CONTENT SHARING PLATFORMS

The definition of social media presented in the publication *Social Media Definition and the Governance Challenge* consolidates multiple sources and outlines four key characteristics of social networks:

- "Social media services are (currently) Web 2.0 Internet-based applications;
- User-generated content is the lifeblood of the social media;
- Individuals and groups create user-specific profiles for a site or app designed and maintained by a social media service;
- Social media services facilitate the development of social media networks online by connecting a profile with those of other individuals and/or groups."[7]

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[7] Obar, J. A., & Wildman, S. S. (2015). Social Media Definition and the Governance Challenge: An Introduction to the Special Issue, *Telecommunications policy, 39(9),* 745-750, page 2

In the publication *The Politics of "Platforms"*, the author extensively analyzes terminology of the term platform and concludes that it is a multifaceted concept that fits into all expected functions that social networks have towards their various target groups (creators, users, advertisers, mainstream media).[8]

The term content-sharing platforms will be used synonymously with the concept of social networks in this paper, although it can also be viewed as a lower-level concept falling under the umbrella term of social networks, which in this case does not affect the research outcome.

It is entirely expected that indigenous products of the digital environment (including platforms) do not fit into classifications that belong to the offline world. If they could be fully defined by the previously established terms and regulated by existing protocols, these products would not be authentically digital - they would be some form of a digitized[9] product.

Multi-identity and integration of elements from the offline environment into the whole concept of online service in the case of platforms is entirely logical and organic, so it is important to react to it through analysis and thinking from the perspective of digital technologies and their global and dispersed nature.

This paper conducts analysis through comparison with individual categories that are part of their identity, attempting to understand the importance of each element of platform identity, its function, and how it affects the platform's capacity to influence the content found on it, and consequently, how to approach the conception and implementation of future regulations.

Platforms as ICT Technologies

According to the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning portal, the term "Information and communication technologies (ICT) is defined as a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information." [10]

"ICT covers any product that will store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit or receive information electronically in a digital form."[11] Within ICT, digital communication technologies

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[8] Gillespie, T. (2010) The Politics of 'Platforms'. *New media & society*, *12(3),* 347-364

[9] Digitization is the process of translating material from the material, offline world into digital form. It's a simple technological process and it doesn't change the object of digitization but only makes it accessible in digital form.

[10] https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/glossary/information-and-communication-technologies-ict, last accessed on 4 March 2024

[11] Meghe, G. (2000), *Information and Communication Technology*, Charles Lwanga College of Education eLibrary (https://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:7cO6_8BA5LkJ:scholar.google.com/+Meghe,+G.+(2000),+Information+and+Communication+Technology&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5), page 1

are also recognized as a subgroup focused on communication among users that enables digital exchange of information.

Each definition of ICT technologies from the literature used defines the exchange and storage of information using digital technologies as a key characteristic of the concept.

This is precisely what platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) do for their users. They are large databases with additional communication capabilities (comments, chats, live streaming, etc.). If we completely disregard the influence of the platforms on cultural needs and media habits, and reduce their functions to operational capabilities, the platforms fully correspond to the concept of ICT technology.

For example, YouTube (also applicable to Facebook, X and other social media) originated as a technological startup, and the initial idea was indeed to enable the exchange and storage of information. More complex structures, influence and functions came later, during the natural growth and development of the project. Legally, being an ICT is the only official identity of a platform[12], regardless of the subsequent work and expansion of activities. On the other hand, in the publication *Digital Technologies and the Legal Framework of Cultural Policy in Serbia*, it is stated that "Cultural policy should follow and then react to all novelties brought through ICT by applying appropriate instruments and measures. One way to make the use of ICT legitimate is to endorse it, name it, and terminologically define it, through the legal framework." [13] ICT is recognized as an element falling within the scope of cultural policies, although there is no legal basis for this point of view.

Platforms as Media

"The term "media" refers to those channels or tools capable of storing, transmitting and delivering information and data. Often, this word is synonymous with mass media or news media,

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[12] https://tinyurl.com/4bm4sz52; https://www.naics.com/company-profile-page/?co=8262, last accessed on 13 March 2024

[13] Stojanović A. (2021) Digitalne tehnologije i pravni okvir kulturne politike u Srbiji (Digital Technologies and the Legal Framework of Cultural Policy in Serbia), u: Dragićević Šešić M. i Nikolić T., *Digitalni horizonti kulture, umetnosti i medija*, Institut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti (Digital Horizons of Culture, Art and Media, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, Faculty of Dramatic Arts), Clio, Belgrade, page 50

but it can also refer to the general concept of media used for the transmission and communication of any data, for any purpose."[14]

When we studied the media, we usually, and fairly safely, had in mind the 'communication media' and the specialised and separate institutions and organizations in which people worked: print media and the press, photography, advertising, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), publishing, and so on. [15]

This paper will primarily refer to the concept of media as the mass communication industry, but it will also address segments dealing with the technological and/or communicational components of the concept.

In technological terms, there are certain overlaps in the definitions of what constitutes media and what constitutes information and communication technologies (ICT). It can be said that the concept of media is broader, encompassing the general principle of communication using a specific medium, while ICT narrows this field down to the digital world.

Throughout the process of examining and analysing media and the relationship between media and digital content-sharing platforms, the key questions undoubtedly revolved around communication and the content being communicated, because content is precisely what defines media as a distinct category in relation to technological means.

The content communicated through media is creative - it has artistic components in its expression. Moreover, it is planned content, strategically designed to meet the needs of the assumed audience - to fulfil informative, educational, entertainment, and other functions.

At first glance, it may seem that the platforms lack this component in their operation, but, in fact, it is the decentralization of that principle – the platforms delegate content planning to their constituents, i.e., users/content creators who individually deploy the planned content to their audience.

Analogous processes can be observed in all other media as well, through individual programs (and their authorial and production teams) targeting specific audiences and creating content for them within a larger system - media companies.

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[14] Crnobrnja S. (2014), *Novi mediji i društvene mreže,* Centar za medije i komunikacije, Fakultet za medije i komunikacije Univerzitet Singidunum (New Media and Social Networks, Center for Media and Communications, Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University), Belgrade, page 85
[15] Lister M., Dovey J., Giddings S., Grant I., Kelly K. (2009) *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London, page 9

"Convergence is the merging of previously separate communication industries (and media) such as publishing, computers, film, music, broadcasting, mobile telephony, into a new and unique communication area (medium), enabled by the technological progress."[16]

It is clear that the content-sharing platforms also belong to the concept of media; they are indeed an example of the mentioned convergence - they display and retain content (similar to how broadcasting broadcasts it and publishing permanently disseminates it) that encompasses music, film, visual and experimental art forms, all while enabling live communication among users (similar to mobile telephony).

Platforms as Editors

Under the term "editor" in this paper, we will encompass an entity responsible for the content of a media program - the one who, at a structural and hierarchical level (whole program, program segment, individual editorial office), creates the concept of a program, makes decisions, delegates tasks, and bears responsibility for the content that the media will communicate to the audience.

Platforms are ICT tools; they do not have any official editorial policy - they do not interfere with the content in any way.

The specificity of platforms in this regard is that they truly do not interfere with the content; the possibilities are endless, and every form and genre can be found on platforms. Thus, authentic formats have developed (tweets, vlogs, tutorials, TikTok dances, etc.). Indeed, anything can be found on platforms - from experimental art forms, through informative programs, music, documentaries, and a wide range of fiction, to commercial content.

However, if a creator aspires to be a professional - a YouTuber, TikToker, or an influencer in a broader sense, the invisible hand of the editor influences them through the operation of the algorithm.

This is not the classical assignment of formats seen in the editorial offices of traditional and electronic media, but it is the assignment of formats through soft power - creators themselves decide to behave within the given framework, they are not forced to do it, but if they want to

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[16] Crnobrnja S. (2014), *Novi mediji i društvene mreže,* Centar za medije i komunikacije, Fakultet za medije i komunikacije Univerzitet Singidunum (New Media and Social Networks, Center for Media and Communications, Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University), Belgrade, page 35

succeed (and they do), they do not have the option to behave contrary to the parameters and expect success.

Considering that ambitious users (prosumers) have knowledge or at least intuitively sense some of these parameters (also - knowledge, information, or assumptions about these parameters are topics in the digital public space), they will strategically, and sometimes unconsciously, orient themselves in relation to those parameters, just as a media worker looks at the editorial policy of their editorial office.

Platforms as Producers

In this paper, the term "producer" refers to an independent producer - an individual or a team (legal entity) who independently produces art and/or media content and offers it to the art/media market for which it is created.

The term producer will not imply executive production within a specific production company or externally engaged executive/service production that operationally implements a task set by the editor - in this case, the media company itself is considered the producer.

Viewed on a broader scale, a platform delivers a creative product - a program or curated guidance through the content of its users, subcontractors.

This process can be associated with the concept of group exhibitions, as well as film, music, and theater festivals, which create cultural content for their audience based on a similar principle. In this process, producers create a program through a selection process, all with the aim of attracting paying audiences and thus closing the funding cycle. In the case of a platform, the general offer is formed by the absolute absence of selection, the quantity of content grows organically, and the selection process is actually everything that the algorithm performs. The funding cycle is closed by selling time, data, and users' needs to advertisers - it is the new currency.

In a narrower sense, for example, YouTube is a producer because there are special segments, often scripted, and/or reality series produced by YouTube included in the offered content, while the related platforms - content distribution platforms (Netflix, Amazon, Disney+) have their own content production in a traditional sense.

<u>Platforms as Regulators</u>

"Regulatory bodies are state institutions responsible for regulating certain areas of special societal interest."[17] Also, viewed outside the framework of the state, "A novelty that emerged in the second half of the 20th century with the promotion of the tenets of liberal economics is regulatory agencies."[18] The reasons for establishing independent regulatory agencies include: protection of human rights; external control of the government; transparency, accountability, and public integrity of state institutions; stable development and protection of market freedom; ensuring the realization of public interest through expertise-based governance.

Platforms are legal entities, i.e., private corporations that should be subject to regulatory oversight. Since this is not yet the case on a global scale (the only regulation is being implemented in the EU), and platforms in most parts of the world do not have a responsibility to any regulatory entity outside themselves, it is interesting to analyse their relationship with their own system, internally.

The function of regulatory bodies in the media market is to control the correctness of operations according to the established standards. Just as the regulators issue licenses, verify correctness, and impose sanctions if necessary, platforms grant figurative licenses to individuals who create accounts (for users who gain popularity and start monetizing content, this license becomes less figurative).

For example, through the Terms of Service and Community guidelines, YouTube defines business standards, and when it identifies a problem, it imposes sanctions, the most severe of which is license revocation—just as it happens in the relationship between the regulators and media companies.

Digital content-sharing platforms have a structure similar to the system within which they operate. They function as regulators for their creators, but since no one outside of the EU performs that function over them, they become regulators in the market for most of the world. As there is no established scope of operation, the platforms become the sole parameter, and their choice of content to be published becomes the sole criterion for the public.

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[17] Radojević M. (2010), Nezavisna (regulatorna) tela i institucije u Srbiji, *Srpska politička misao* (Independent (Regulatory) Bodies and Institutions in Serbia, Serbian Political Thought) *4/2010, god. 17, vol.30,* Belgrade, page 53
[18] Jelinčić J. (2016), *Nezavisni državni organi,* Fondacija za otvoreno društvo : Centar za primenjene evropske studije (Independent State Authorities, Open Society Foundation: Center for Applied European Studies)*,* Belgrade, page 14

"An independent body, like any state body in a democratic society, is subject to the (constitutional) principles of accountability and transparency in its work."[19] Since platforms are neither state bodies nor independent bodies that have received delegated authority over a specific area of the economy by the state, they are not subject to this principle. For this reason, the public is at risk of long-term exposure to content that does not meet the required quality standards that state or delegated independent bodies would have set to achieve the goals of cultural policy, which are in the service of the public interest.

Moreover, in countries that belong to the liberal model or in media sectors that are not directly regulated, the profession often sets certain standards for its operations and work outcomes through professional associations/unions[20] or NGOs[21], that aim to establish rules and address the issue of accountability properly. In the case of platforms, they avoid such a procedure through vague regulations within the platform and bypass media regulations by defining activities outside media frameworks.

It is important to note that bottom-up initiatives of creators also emerge even on the platforms. In the absence of frameworks, they organize themselves in case the need to react to certain content is noticed.

Looking at the broader picture, "While in the field of technology, self-regulation has the task of ensuring continuous and proper operation of machines, on the socio-economic level, it excludes the need for state interventionism and represents an imperative for further development of capitalist relations."[22] The platform itself represents the ideal of excluding state interventionism (primarily due to its global nature and legal form as an information and communication technology tool), and self-regulation is also carried out within the platform community—the user community has established mechanisms of self-regulation.

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[19] Jelinčić J. (2016), *Nezavisni državni organi*, Fondacija za otvoreno društvo : Centar za primenjene evropske studije (Independent State Authorities, Open Society Foundation: Center for Applied European Studies), Belgrade, page 22
[20] The American film industry, centered in Los Angeles, is largely regulated through the activities of film workers' unions (such as ASC, WGA, SAG-AFTRA, and others), which set standards for business protocols, starting from working hours, mutual rights and obligations, compensation, classification of skill levels, as well as providing opportunities for additional education and professional development.
[21] The Press Council (Savet za štampu), an independent self-regulatory body in Serbia that brings together stakeholders in publishing and journalism, has issued the *Code of journalists of Serbia* to improve the professional standards of the profession and establish protocols for responding to instances of misconduct.
[22] Todorović A.L. (2017), *Diskurs novih tehnologija (Discourse of New Technologies)*, Clio, Belgrade, page 49

The Platforms` Mechanisms of Influence as Counterparts to the Instruments of Cultural Policies

The mechanisms of influence primarily considered in this research are:

- the settings defined by Terms of Service and Community guidelines & policies
- algorithms that are a completely innovative structure in the system of oversight, control, and regulation and do not belong to existing categories but are considered to be invisible power mechanism
- self-regulation elements - cancel culture[23] and similar models within the internal user system.

Through an analysis of the effects that the Terms of Service and Community Guidelines have on creators and users (and thus on the entire digital cultural scene), parallels can be drawn with the cultural policies implemented by states. The most obvious correlation is the relationship between the mode of operation and the means by which operations are conducted and the similarity to the instruments of cultural policy.

"Cultural policy represents a set of managerial measures and activities through which the holders of public policy, based on political, legal, and financial authority obtained through democratic elections, manage cultural life and cultural development in a specific territory."[24] "Regardless of whether it is implicit or explicit, short-term or long-term, based on concrete needs and problems of citizens or on abstract and vague ideas and general principles of the political and cultural elite, in countries where the state accepts responsibility in the field of culture, it allocates funds from the state budget and directs them to development - cultural policy exists. In this sense, it is the public practical policy in the field of culture, arts, and media." [25] "Even the liberal model

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[23] "*Canceling* is an expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one's attention from someone or something whose values, (in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money... *Cancel culture* is situated within the Habermasean concept of the public sphere which assumes public discourse is the realm of the elites. (Clark, M. (2020). DRAG THEM: A brief etymology of so-called "cancel culture", *Communication and the Public*, 5(3-4), 88-92.)
Such a perspective on the phenomenon finds its basis in the fact that the most influential creators are those whose reactions lead all others and dispute the organic nature of the phenomenon.
[24] Đukić V. (2010), *Država i kultura: studije savremene kulturne politike*, Insititut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju: Fakultet dramskih umetnosti (State and Culture: Studies of Contemporary Cultural Policy, Institute for Theater, Film, Radio and Television: Faculty of Dramatic Arts), Belgrade, page 65
[25] Đukić V. (2010), *Država i kultura: studije savremene kulturne politike*, Insititut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju: Fakultet dramskih umetnosti (*State and Culture: Studies of Contemporary Cultural Policy*, Institute for Theater, Film, Radio and Television: Faculty of Dramatic Arts), Belgrade, page 24

of cultural policy, as a model of non-interference by the state in the field of culture, implies the existence of a set of goals and tasks to be achieved with the help of appropriate measures, instruments, and activities, and that is precisely how most authors define the concept of cultural policy." [26]

In that sense, using the case of Google LLC as an example through the operation of the YouTube platform which it owns, a clear analogy is observed between the mechanisms of influence and the instruments of cultural policy where organizational instruments correspond to elements of the business plan; economic instruments to content monetization on platforms and incentive programs[27]; legal-political instruments to Terms and Policies of Use, and mechanisms of system regulation and internal regulations; and ideation instruments to usage guidelines as well as rewards that the platform awards for achieving a certain number of followers.

In his book *Silicon Valley,* Christoph Keese argues that, in a symbolic way, it becomes clear that corporations of this level are indeed on par with states in many respects.[28] The author primarily substantiates this claim based on the observed business and protocol relations that Google LLC maintains with government institutions (in this specific case, institutions of Germany).

Beyond the symbolic level (which should not be overlooked when social and economic phenomena are the subject of analysis), platforms do indeed adopt the model of state governance in certain segments of their work but also enjoy the authority among their users that reaches a higher and more complex level than the authority expected in the provider-user service relationship.

To conclude this discussion, it is important to reflect on the idea of the service user as some kind of citizen of the digital state and analyse the prosumer model of users.

As the etymology of the word implies (pro - producer, creator; sumer - consumer, user, audience), this model represents a way of use characterized by creating content for platforms on which the prosumer also spends his/her time as an audience member.

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[26] Dragićević Šešić M., Stojković B. (2011*), KULTURA menadžment, animacija, marketing (CULTURE Management, Animation, Marketing)*, Clio, Belgrade page 21

[27] For example, *Google Prefered.*

[28] Keze K (Keese C). (2016), *Silicijumska dolina (Silicon Valley)*, Laguna, Belgrade, page 208, 209

"Digital technologies have created an audience that has never been more powerful, an audience that has tools for creating media content, an audience exposed to an endless source of information, entertainment, knowledge, an audience that becomes the media."[29]

"We define prosumers as individuals who consume and produce value, either for self-consumption or consumption by others, and can receive implicit or explicit incentives from organizations involved in the exchange."[30]

The emergence of the prosumer model is directly related to the transition to Web 2.0. "The shift to Web 2.0 can be characterized as a shift from user as a consumer to user as a participant"[31] This paper analyses prosumers as content creators on platforms, representing the subject of action by corporations.

THE PLATFORMS' BUSINESSES ETHICS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULATIONS

"Deontology, or professional ethics, is defined as a set of obligations that ensures the regulation of certain practices, which can only stem from morality, and in that case would represent only a narrow subset of that morality."[32]

According to this definition, which sees business ethics as a set of obligations ensuring the regulation of certain practices, a logical question arises - which practices? If a platform is reduced to its formal status, it only regulates the functionality of providing engineering services and data protection. However, if a platform is viewed in the entirety of its impact, then the question of business ethics becomes far more complex.

These companies act tactically within financial, cultural, and regulatory contexts. They position themselves to achieve current and future profits, globally managing to find and exploit a loophole between legal protections that suit them and obligations that do not, while simultaneously creating a cultural environment in which their services make sense. Therefore, defining these services using the term platform is of particular importance. Through this term, companies manage

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[29] Martinoli, A. (2018). Black Mirror–digitalni mediji i uticaj novih tehnologija na savremeno društvo, *Zbornik radova br. 33*, Institut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti, Belgrade, page 133

[30] Lang, B., Dolan, R., Kemper, J., Northey, G. (2021). Prosumers in times of crisis: definition, archetypes and implications, *Journal of Service Management*, 32(2), 176-189, page 4

[31] Obar, J. A., & Wildman, S. S. (2015). Social Media Definition and the Governance Challenge: An Introduction to the Special Issue, *Telecommunications policy*, *39*(9), 745-750, page 7

[32] Korni D. (1999), *Etika informisanja (Information Ethics)*, Clio, Belgrade, page 10

to reach all important stakeholders for their business - users (prosumers), advertisers, mainstream media companies, and decision-makers who are needed as partners. [33]

Looking at how platforms communicate their services to various stakeholders and how they build their brand, it is clear that the platforms' leadership is very aware of the platforms' influence. The absence of ethical standards in business is not due to a lack of understanding of their own position but rather intentional behavior aimed at maintaining a neutral status that will protect the company from regulations.

In the context of the DSA introduction in the EU member states, it will be interesting to observe the platforms' attitudes towards regulation and analyse any attempts to tactically respond to new circumstances versus the option of cooperation with regulators and the overall positive development of the online environment.

Christopher Hodges, in his publication *Ethical Business Regulation: Understanding the Evidence*, argues that "Businesses should be encouraged to adopt ethical practice throughout their organisations and activities"[34] and that "Supporting ethical commercial behaviour requires leadership and support from all stakeholders, including staff, customers, suppliers, investors, competitors and commentators – and regulators, politicians and the media. There should be a culture not just of achieving the relevant regulatory and behavioural standards but also of continuous learning and improvement."[35]

At first glance, the complex identity of platforms that do not have consumers but users challenges this way of thinking about business ethics. However, upon closer analysis of their operations, it is noticed that users are also part of the workforce, and the key value or ideology that both the platforms and users adhere to is profit. Through interface design, verification systems, and rewards programs, the primary value communicated is popularity and the importance of the number of followers, rather than content quality and setting aesthetic and ethical standards. Introducing new regulations does not fundamentally impact this segment of promoting better business ethics.

In this regard, the importance of regulatory systems for the general ethical code of a society and its segments with a focus on the economy should also be considered. By establishing rules,

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[33] Gillespie, T. (2010), The Politics of 'Platforms', *New media & society*, 12(3), 347-364., page 2,3
[34] Hodges, C. (2016). Ethical Business Regulation: Understanding the Evidence. *Birmingham: Department for Business Innovation & Skills, Better Regulation Delivery Office,* page 9
[35] Hodges, C. (2016). Ethical Business Regulation: Understanding the Evidence. *Birmingham: Department for Business Innovation & Skills, Better Regulation Delivery Office,* page 6

the relationships between right and wrong are clarified, transcending individual behaviours and moving towards a level of value-based order or society's ethical code.

Stephanie Hare, in her book *Technology is Not Neutral: A Short Guide to Technology Ethics,* identifies two ways in which regulations operate - through controlling the object of regulation and its production (such as weapons, toxic substances, etc.) or through regulating the manner of use (for example, the production of eating utensils is not regulated, but they cannot be used for attacking someone/something). [36] In the case of content-sharing platforms, regulations[37] arise as a reaction to almost a decade of functioning without an ethical code and rules, having complete freedom in a space without consequences. The Digital Services Act task will be not only to establish an operational content control system but also to fill the void in creating awareness of the importance of ethics in media production at all levels - from digital editions of traditional and electronic media to user-generated content.

The research conducted by Danica Čigoja Piper, using focus groups as a method, yielded the following result: four out of five professional journalists employed in online print media feel that they do not initiate enough changes in the media environment, but they also believe that this is not entirely their fault, as the working conditions are such that the media market is saturated and journalists are replaceable. In the same study, when asked about the verification of information, a journalist insists on the mandatory citation of sources to ensure that they are not the authors of potentially fake news[38], but they do not necessarily insist on thorough verification to ensure that the news is definitely accurate.

This data is alarming to a large extent when considering that it reflects the stance of professionals whose job is to create content and who are trained to conduct this process. The majority of content on social media is created by amateurs, who, by the nature of their position, do not have adequate ethical guidance, and it seems they cannot have professional media representatives as positive and consistent role models.

It is interesting to note Sanja Domazet's observation that during the transition from print to online, journalistic formats have largely transformed by shifting more towards the forms aimed at

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[36] Hare S., (2022) *Technology is Not Neutral: A Short Guide to Technology Ethics*, London Publishing Partnership, London, page 204
[37] DSA and following initatives.
[38] Čigoja Piper D., (2020) Kritičko mišljenje u digitlanoj eri*: Časopis Kultura broj (Critical Thinking in the Digital Era: Culture Journal Number 169/2020*, Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka (Institute for the Cultural Development Research), Belgrade, page 138, 139

capturing readers' attention rather than towards traditional reporting and investigative journalism. Writing styles have become more personal, authorial, often humorous, critical, and polemical - characteristics previously associated mainly with columns. [39] In the online world, professional media workers adapt to the norms of amateur mass communication and content exchange rather than the reverse - amateurs aspiring to establish themselves in the online space adopting the standards of professional media workers. While such freedom of expression by prosumers has undoubtedly led to aesthetic freedom and the creation of authentic digital genres, it has failed to reach the expected ethical standard in content creation for platforms.

"In this regard, it is particularly important to emphasise that competent state authorities should enable the development and strengthening of critical thinking in the digital media culture through the creation of quality public policies in the field of media literacy. This process entails that the creator primarily has a vision and, therefore, a strategy that will ensure activities leading to the fulfillment of its goals." [40]

Media literacy and critical thinking are fundamental to raising standards in content creation on the platforms. The responsibility of state systems in developing media literacy among their citizens (i.e., creators on platforms) is significant, and action is necessary.

Existing activities in our region, systematised and described by Zarić (International Expert Meeting on Media and Information Literacy; work of the committee for drafting the "Belgrade Guidelines for Drafting Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula"; Panel discussion "Critical Thinking and Digital Immunity")[41], are important initiatives that put Serbia in an engaged position in considering the digital media space.

Although influencing citizens` awareness is a way to affect content through the bottom-up approach, this action alone is not enough. Platforms are systems of immense scale, thus wielding enormous power in shaping the digital environment. The lack of initiatives to regulate platform

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[39] Domazet S., Kritičko mišljenje na srpskim digitalnim portalima: *Časopis Kultura broj 169/2020,* Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka (Critical Thinking on Serbian Digital Portals: Culture Journal No. 169/2020, Institute for the Cultural Development Research), Belgrade, pages 166, 167, 168

[40] Zarić M. (2020), Uloga kritičkog mišljenja u digitalnoj medijskoj kulturi i jačanju digitalnog imuniteta:
Časopis Kultura broj 169/2020, Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka (The Role of Critical Thinking in Digital Media Culture and Strengthening Digital Immunity: Culture Journal No. 169/2020, Institute for the Cultural Development Research), Belgrade, page 399

[41] Zarić M. (2020), Uloga kritičkog mišljenja u digitalnoj medijskoj kulturi i jačanju digitalnog imuniteta: *Časopis Kultura broj 169/2020*, Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka (The Role of Critical Thinking in Digital Media Culture and Strengthening Digital Immunity: Culture Journal No. 169/2020, Institute for the Cultural Development Research), Belgrade, page 404, 405, 407

operations and demand higher ethical standards on a global scale may be due to the awareness of operational obstacles in such regulation, or it may be a consequence of the economic (and thus political and social) power of the platforms. Therefore, the initiative to enact legislation analogous to the DSA in the Western Balkans region is of particular importance. This initiative was started by the fact-checking NGO Zašto ne from Bosnia & Herzegovina that coordinated the regional activities by establishing the Working Group on Digitalization and Connectivity, resulting in several meetings and, most importantly, in the publication entitled *Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Digitalization and Connectivity[42]*, produced during Tirana Civil Society Forum 2023 in a session also led by Zašto ne. Also, the efforts were continued through the collaboration between Partners Serbia, OSCE, and the Open Society Foundation, bringing together the Western Balkans region with the aim of consulting the stakeholders in the EU member states, local and European experts, and researchers to initiate the introduction of national regulations applying the DSA provisions.[43]

"Most media researchers agree on the assessment that private capital invested in media activities tends to multiply, meaning that the media's business activities tend to increase and maintain a trend of profit rate growth."[44] The same model applies to the digital platforms - the idea of ethical business is completely disregarded in the pursuit of profit rate growth. Moreover, even if there was an intention of doing ethical business, there is no room for it to thrive, as ethical business does not pay off. With the introduction of the Digital Services Act and similar future regulations, the platforms are placed in a position where they can be penalized with significant financial expenses, which is the only penalty that can impact corporations of such structure and size, at least in the initial phase we find ourselves in.

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[42] *Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Digitalization and Connectivity*, Civil Society Forum Tirana 2023 (https://www.wb-csf.eu/docs/03_Key-Recommendations-of-the-Thematic-Working-Group-on-Digitalization-and-Connectivity.pdf.pdf)
[43] Notes from: *Future of the Western Balkans in Digital Europe* - roundtable discussion, 25 January 2024, *Privacy week conference*
[44] Tomić B. (2012), Etika medija između deregulacije i samoregulacije, u Čekić J., Blagojević J., *Moć / mediji / &,* Centar za medije i komunikacije, Fakultet za medije i komunikacije Univerzitet Singidunum (Media Ethics between Deregulation and Self-Regulation, in Čekić J., Blagojević J., Power / Media/ &, Center for Media and Communications, Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University), Belgrade, page 51

"The Digital Services Act (DSA) is the world's first digital regulation that makes digital companies across the EU accountable for the content posted on their platforms.

The Digital Services Act focuses on creating a safer online environment for digital users and companies, and on protecting fundamental rights in the digital space by establishing new rules on:

- countering illegal content online, including goods, services and information, in full respect of the Charter of Fundamental Rights
- tackling societal risks online
- the traceability of traders in online marketplaces
- transparency measures for online platforms
- enhanced supervision

The Council adopted the DSA on 4 October 2022. The new rules apply since 17 February 2024."[45]

"All online intermediary companies that connect users with content, products and services in the EU single market, whether they are established inside or outside the Union, must follow the DSA. These include:

- online marketplaces
- social networks
- content-sharing platforms
- online travel and accommodation platforms

Rules are proportionate to the companies' size and impact on society. Very small platforms are exempt from most obligations. Stricter rules apply to very large online platforms (VLOPs) and search engines (VLOSEs) with more than 45 million active users, considering the key role they play in e-commerce, in disseminating information and in facilitating the exchange of opinions and ideas.

- Alibaba AliExpress; Amazon Store; Apple AppStore; Bing; Booking.com; Facebook; Google Play; Google Maps; Google Search; Google Shopping; Instagram; LinkedIn; Pinterest;

Snapchat; TikTok; Wikipedia; X (previously known as Twitter); YouTube; Zalando

Also, these are some of the additional requirements that the DSA introduces for such companies:

- establish mitigation plans, subject to audits, for the systemic risks they pose, such as disinformation, manipulation during electoral processes, cyber violence against women, or abuse of minors

- share data with researchers and authorities

- let users decide if they wish to receive personalised recommendations and, if so, how (e.g., not based on their online searches)" [46]

"Given the cross-border nature of the services at stake and the horizontal range of obligations introduced by this Regulation, one authority appointed with the task of supervising the application and, where necessary, enforcing this Regulation should be identified as a Digital Services Coordinator in each Member State."[47] "The Digital Services Coordinator should act as the single contact point with regard to all matters related to the application of this Regulation for the Commission, the Board, the Digital Services Coordinators of other Member States, as well as for other competent authorities of the Member State in question."[48]

Among other fines, the one that is most relevant for this discussion is defined in Article 59 - Fines: "In the decision referred to in Article 73[49], the Commission may impose on the provider of the very large online platform or of the very large online search engine concerned fines not exceeding 6 % of its total worldwide annual turnover in the preceding financial year where it finds that the provider, intentionally or negligently:

(a) infringes the relevant provisions of this Regulation;

(b) fails to comply with a decision ordering interim measures under Article 70[50]; or

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[46] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act/, last accessed on 11 March 2024

[47] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (*Digital Services Act*), page 30 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065)

[48] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (*Digital Services Act*), page 30 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065)

[49] Elaboration on Non-Compliance.

[50] Elaboration on Interim Measures.

(c) fails to comply with a commitment made binding by a decision pursuant to Article 71[51]."[52]

The importance of such regulation does not need to be discussed; it is a revolutionary step in overcoming the challenges of global nature of the digital world. In practice, each EU member state will be able to influence the value component of media content through delegated bodies, which is crucial for creating and maintaining a healthy society.

Aside from analysing the system operability, which at this phase of implementation appears stable (initial results expected by the end of 2024), it is important to note the broad inclusivity of the system and the parallel application of regulation from multiple centers. The regulation involves:

- actions of DSA Coordinators who can react and control the platform's response to reported problematic content;
- actions of the platforms themselves, which will have to react promptly according to their own established rules[53] and better control through the establishment of entities responsible for the DSA implementation within their teams (Compliance Officers);
- encouraging public involvement in the process by granting the position of Trusted flagger to individuals who, based on their submitted reports, have a privileged status in flagging problematic content. [54]

Besides operability and fairness of implementation, these mechanisms operate at a deeper level. By requiring platforms to establish bodies within their teams to implement the DSA, the idea of embedding ethical standards where they have not organically developed is encouraged. Additionally, by forming the concept of the Trusted flagger position, the bottom-up principle is promoted, aligning with the analogous content creation model. Therefore, the audience is

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[51] Elaboration on Commitments.

[52] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (*Digital Services Act*), page 94 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065)

[53] In countries where the DSA is not applied, or in all countries before the emergence of the DSA, platforms defined a mechanism for content regulation, as well as parameters for permissible and impermissible content in their Terms and Policies of Use. However, the mechanism itself left ample room for maneuvering for the platform to (not) act. For this reason, the content that violates the parameters of permissibility has been (and continues to be) found on platforms for years.

[54] With regular process evaluation, the chance of abusing one's position is minimized.

encouraged to actively participate in the process by further developing critical thinking, through community engagement, and media literacy.

Although there are justified reasons for optimism, the challenges in the DSA implementation are significant. Firstly, it is the first global initiative of this kind, with no previous reference experience to rely on in designing and implementing regulatory mechanisms. Therefore, various obstacles, recognitions of shortcomings, or dysfunctional parts of the established system can be expected during implementation.

In the context of globality, it is a system of individual national regulators operating under a common *lex generalis*, i.e., the DSA. It is a law that regulates processes and protocols, it does not regulate content[55], which makes it truly globally potent but also opens up the possibility of complications in the joint actions of member states that may have conflicting opinions on various aspects of implementation, especially considering that the law implies cooperation of national bodies.

Another challenge, perhaps the greatest, is the scale of the system being regulated - the potential volume of processes to be verified, the personnel needed to carry out this task, and experts to train and supervise them. Additionally, one should not forget the significant challenge for all countries, which is the proper selection of DSA Coordinators, who are the crucial bodies for the adequate implementation of regulation and thus positive results. The DSA provides a precise and strict list of requirements that a candidate needs to fulfil in order to be approved as the DSA Coordinator. These requirements are crucial for protecting all sides involved and ensuring fair implementation of the regulations for everyone involved.

Although the DSA does not regulate content, the ultimate goal is to create a healthier online environment with less undesirable content, achieved through better governance mechanisms. Hopefully, through the long-term creation of healthier communities and potential expansion of the DSA's scope to countries outside the EU, it can be assumed that future audiences whose habits are formed in a healthier environment will not have such a developed need for consuming harmful content, and that such content will not be as readily available.

Since the DSA foresees six-monthly reports for almost all entities involved in its implementation (both from the platforms and the states), monitoring and evaluation will be

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[55] Notes from: *Future of the Western Balkans in Digital Europe* - roundtable discussion, 25 January 2024, *Privacy week conference*

possible, and based on them, corrective measures can be taken to optimize the system. As the system changes, the implementation will be able to keep up with the changes, making sure that the goals, processes and results are always up to date.

<u>The Western Balkans Initiative and Its Specific Challenges</u>

As already mentioned, the Balkan activities were initiated by Zašto ne, an NGO from Bosnia & Herzegovina, that organized and coordinated several meetings of Balkan and European stakeholders, and that has been leading the Working Group on Digitalization and Connectivity, with the main result being a thorough analysis and a set of recommendations from Tirana Civil Society Forum 2023 - *Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Digitalization and Connectivity*. Also, Partners Serbia, in cooperation with the OSCE and the Open Society Foundation, has gathered the interested parties from the Western Balkans region through the initiative to apply the DSA provisions in the non-EU countries, i.e., for the states to independently enact laws based on the DSA legal provisions.

Over several public and private round table meetings in late 2023 and the beginning of 2024, experts, researchers, and other interested parties from the countries exchanged their ideas, motivations, analysis of the local market, possible obstacles, and outcomes among themselves and representatives of the EU member states who provided a detailed insight into the current process of the DSA implementation. The presence of the EU member states` representatives is of special importance, as support for such initiatives is necessary for the NGOs` attempt to be taken into consideration by the state administration system while proposing these profound changes.

As expected, besides the general challenges that are part of the process for the EU member states mentioned in the previous chapter, the biggest perceived obstacles are:

- Instability of the political system, i.e., lack of independence, the perceived informal practices[56] leading to irregular implementation of procedures, imprecise guidelines, and the appointment of biased and/or unqualified personnel to decision-making positions.
- Insufficient independence and competence of the bodies that would take on the role of DSA

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[56] In the publication *Informality in the Western Balkans: A culture, a contextual rational choice, or both?,* the authors conclude that in the Western Balkans, the informal practices are percieved to be omnipresent, even in the parts of the system that should be heavily regulated. (Cvetičanin, P., Popovikj, M., & Jovanović, M. (2019). Informality in the Western Balkans: A culture, a contextual rational choice, or both?. Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 19(4), 585-604., page 15)

Coordinators.

- Small market size - while platforms have no choice but to accept cooperation and implement the DSA when it comes to the EU, individual small markets in the region may be negligible for platforms. In this sense, the support of the European Commission is crucial.[57]

- Value-based bias of governing bodies and media illiteracy among citizens, critical habits, polarized opinions, and tabloidized logic of creation, selection, and perception of information and entertainment, which can pose a problem in determining harmful content. This is a problem related to the content rather than the protocols regulated by the DSA, but it is very important for the final result in the region.

- Insufficient economic and infrastructural development of the region - assuming that investments in software infrastructure and new workforce would be necessary to establish functional systems.

Regardless of the complexity of the circumstances in the region, the Balkan stakeholders` initiative to lobby for the introduction of regulations remains unwavering. It is evident that the expert community views this process as an opportunity to address the digital space issues swiftly and in line with the reference structures (in this case the EU). Additionally, if the initiative obtains the support of member countries, it will not be unrealistic to expect progress in this field and the eventual adoption of local laws.

In the *Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Digitalization and Connectivity,* the experts divided their insights into sets of guidelines by main stakeholder structures - governments of the Western Balkan region countries, the European Commission and the EU member states, and Civil Societies.[58] If these groups work together, chances are that the initiative will very likely have success.

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[57] Notes from: *Future of the Western Balkans in Digital Europe* - roundtable discussion, 25 January 2024, *Privacy week conference*

[58] *Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Digitalization and Connectivity*, Civil Society Forum Tirana 2023 (https://www.wb-csf.eu/docs/03_Key-Recommendations-of-the-Thematic-Working-Group-on-Digitalization-and-Connectivity.pdf.pdf)

CONCLUSION

The service provided by companies through hosting is divided into two consumer segments. The first segment consists of users - they are both the consumers and the ones who provide content (users - creators/prosumers), but they are also providing the data that feeds the algorithm, thereby giving the platform what it needs to attract advertisers (their own time, habits, wishes, etc.). The second consumer segment is advertisers - the real consumer segment. They generate revenue, and they are the ones that the platforms actually need to satisfy.

Tarleton Gillespie identifies mainstream media companies as a third consumer segment that also utilizes this space, noting that "From early on, YouTube has aggressively sought strategic partnerships with professional media companies, to include commercial media content alongside its user-generated submissions."[59] The platforms do everything in their power to obtain what they need to provide high-quality service to the second consumer segment while paying only as much attention to the first segment as necessary to maintain the system with constant growth.

This goal is not difficult to achieve because the platform is one of the products of the network economy - the interconnectedness of actors (users) gives them an advantage in the market and kills competition. Success is guaranteed as long as the user network expands, and in the case of most leading platforms, these services have existed long enough to establish a monopoly in the market. Users are somewhat trapped on a platform because the network economy is such that even if they wanted to go elsewhere, it does not make sense - everyone else is using one of the services, solo leaving a platform is like committing a social suicide, and collective migration to another platform is not operationally feasible.

Daniel Korni notes the presence of "a natural inclination of the countries with a liberal tradition to give precedence to individual responsibility over all other responsibilities."[60] This model can clearly be seen in platforms, which under the guise of freedom of expression, actually give not only priority but complete authority to the individual user responsibility.

In 1995, Nicholas Negroponte compared internet users to dancers in a grand ballroom, but if they learned how to dance just the day before - awkwardly.[61] Almost 30 years later, the change is not significant; technology is developing exponentially faster than the human capacity to

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[59] Gillespie, T. (2010). The Politics of 'Platforms'. *New media & society,* 12(3), 347-364., page 7
[60] Korni D. (1999), *Etika informisanja (Information Ethics)*, Clio, Belgrade, page 89
[61] Negroponte N. (1998), *Biti digitalan (Being Digital)*, Clio, Belgrade

understand and master it. "The speed of development of new technologies, their use, and the changes they cause in us, the audience, happen much faster than theory and legislation can keep up with it. Today, the media market is much more shaped by users' activity than the laws and official procedures can achieve."[62] "The screen also changes our relationship with reality. Owing to the screen, our experience of the real world, the physical environment, becomes fragmented and less real. By going behind the screen, we stop participating in our real environment, and the events we witness online unfold in a new temporal flow."[63] Developing in the digital environment, people make many mistakes, which is quite natural both on a personal and collective level of development, maturation, and optimization.

What is specific to the Internet, however, is that time does not function linearly - content does not go away, it remains there forever. Since all content is presented in the same way, users often do not have an analytical attitude towards the time of its creation; they perceive the content as current. For this reason, the benefit or harm that some content brings is sustained, so without the platform's reaction, personal responsibility remains the only (and, by nature, weak) pillar of ethics among creators. For example, racist and/or misogynistic content was quite regular and accepted on YouTube in the late first and early second decades of the 21st century. Over time, the community matured, and today (still insufficiently), such behaviour is unacceptable. However, since the platform did not (and still does not outside the EU) have an obligation to react, a huge amount of content from that period remains available, and the audience can perceive it as current.

"The new global cultural economy must be seen as a complex disjunctive order with many overlaps and can no longer be understood within the existing models of centre-periphery (not even those capable of explaining multiple centres and peripheries)."[64] It is not an easy task for anyone to properly exist in these fast-growing digital worlds, but it is of utmost importance to promptly find new models, as the time is going fast and the changes multiply and get more complex.

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[62] Martinoli, A. (2018). Black Mirror–digitalni mediji i uticaj novih tehnologija na savremeno društvo, *Zbornik radova br.33,* Institut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti (Black Mirror – Digital Media and the Impact of New Technologies on Contemporary Society, Proceedings No. 33, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, Faculty of Dramatic Arts), Belgrade, page 141

[63] Martinoli, A. (2018). Black Mirror–digitalni mediji i uticaj novih tehnologija na savremeno društvo, *Zbornik radova br.33,* Institut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti (Black Mirror – Digital Media and the Impact of New Technologies on Contemporary Society, Proceedings No. 33, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, Faculty of Dramatic Arts), Belgrade, page 136

[64] Apaduraj A. (2001), *Kultura i globalizacija*, Biblioteka XXI vek (Culture and Globalization, XXI Century Library), Belgrade, page 55

"It is important to emphasize that the Internet provides everyone with the opportunity to showcase their work, their personality, their ego and to freely present what they consider to be the result of their creativity. In itself, this is undoubtedly an incentive, but it is also a potential danger. Unrestrained, uncritical, and uncriticized exposure of one's work can easily lead to self-deception because it can lead the author to declare his/her own opinion on his work as the only possible one and to interpret everyone's equal right to access the Internet as the right of all to be geniuses. Even when some interesting achievements appear, the absence of appropriate criticism and a realistic environment can lead to stagnation and cessation of the development of personalities that could have had much greater reach. In the virtual world, everything becomes virtual – quality, scope, and fame."[65]

Content creators on the Internet gain professional status on account of the number of followers or popularity, but despite this status, content creators on networks are essentially amateurs. Their skills are intuitive, and professional development is practical - they become better craftsmen rather than analysing the essence of their role as someone with influence. As shown in the study *Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip*, methods of understanding the environment in which they work are unsystematic (gossip, assumptions, informal sources), and the only goal is to increase the number of followers.[66] Regardless of good or bad intentions, creators are not capable of making adequate decisions in an environment that does not set necessary boundaries for them. Platforms, not individuals, i.e, users must set the ethical standards.

"Like a mothball, which goes from solid to gas directly, I expect the nation-state to evaporate without first going into a gooey inoperative mess, before some global cyberstate commands the political ether."[67] Although states have not evaporated, the global nature of the digital environment gives cyberstate status to the corporations owning social networks. For this reason, the idea of extending the concept represented in the DSA on a global level is very important. It would be the first global regulation that could significantly contribute to the development of platform ethics, which would be transmitted to the users and also serve as a reference for the implementation of other future global regulations in various spheres.

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[65] Todorović A.L. (2017), *Diskurs novih tehonologija (Discourse of New Technologies),* Clio, Belgrade, page 157
[66] Bishop S. (2019), Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip, *New Media and Society 2*1 (11-12), 2589-2606, page 2, 3, 4
[67] Negroponte N. (1998), *Biti digitalan (Being Digital)*, Clio, Belgrade, page 223

"Berlin Pirate Party chief Christopher Lauer compared Google to a state that targets the rest of the world with intercontinental nuclear missiles, while the rest of the world is armed with spears at best. Lauer says: This is what in neo-German is called asymmetric warfare."[68]

The power that the companies - owners of the platforms, have over the public discourse is perceived as a new form of governance. This power is unique because the norms that social networks approve are applied directly through the very architecture of the platforms. The possibilities for users to reject the established norms are faint; those norms that are very obviously illegitimate can lead to alarmed reactions, but the choice of companies to favour the existing norms that violate human rights is too common[69]. In the circumstances of not understanding the digital environment and the natural delay of regulations behind technology, corporations are doomed to succeed in the race for profit. In this sense, it is important to set the horizon of expectations realistically - changes in the digital environment due to the DSA implementation will not be immediate and/or drastic in the initial period. Due to the existence of businesses that have been uncontrolled in the long term, the DSA implementation will certainly encounter organic difficulties. Just as the platforms have developed negative mechanisms over many years, it will take time for the regulations to undo that effect. Perseverance, patience, and timely responses will be necessary.

The global problem calls for a global solution; all partial options are incomplete and leave room for manipulation. In this regard, the Digital Services Act (DSA) is of immeasurable significance as the first, long-awaited, and multinational regulation that appears promising in terms of expected results. However, that is not enough when considering the global picture and the fact that in a 2023 survey of internet users by country, the first EU member is only ranked 13th (Germany, 77.53 million) compared to the top-ranked China (1,050 million), second-ranked India (692 million), and third-ranked USA (311.3 million).[70] The DSA must become a global standard to create a more favourable base for everyone on the Internet through thoughtful, systemic, and strategic measures directed towards the relevant stakeholders, providing support and guidance towards fulfilling creative and healthy commercial potentials without neglecting the ethical and moral components.

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[68] Keze K. (Keese C.) (2016), *Silicijumska dolina (Silicon Valley)*, Laguna, Belgrade, page 208

[69] Arun, C. (2018), Making choices: Social media platforms and freedom of expression norms, in: *Regardless of Frontiers*, Columbia Univeristy Press, New York

[70] https://www.statista.com/statistics/262966/number-of-internet-users-in-selected-countries/, last accessed on 11 March 2024

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