

Late Night Show Evolution in Albania: From Infotainment to Trash Show

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ABSTRACT

The impact of the new and social media on the audiences has obliged traditional television to adapt to a new culture of TV consumption. With the intention to generate new audiences, accustomed to social network infobesity mainly oriented in fake than real news, spectacle and consumption culture rather than information that affect the public opinion, TV genres are changing their flexible boundaries from infotainment talk show to trash show. But what are these new TV formats emerging in Albanian television? How are they created and under which influences? How are they organized and what kind of topics do they propose to the audiences? Are the interviews preprogrammed or are they spontaneous? What is the typology of their guests? Do they interact with the audiences in the studio? Are the questions of their followers in the social media included in the interview? The above listed questions and other issues are analyzed in this paper. The subject of this study is focused on two of the highest audience rated TV talk shows, “Xing me Ermalin” and “Zonë e lirë”, aired on the national television, Klan. The methodology of this paper is based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data and programs generated by the TV, social media monitoring process and interviews with anchorman, guests and media experts.

Key words: talk show, infotainment, trash show, TV rating, social media, audience

Introduction

Talk show TV programs in Albania started developing after the fall of communism in 1990, and especially after the creation of private television stations in mid- and late '90s. During this period of time, which is considered as the experimentation of television talk shows, the typology of the programs mainly aired are early morning news shows, variety, interviews and political debates.

The beginning of the infotainment subgenres in Albania came to prominence in 2003, when two of the long lasting talk shows *Free zone* with Arian Çani and *Top Show* with Alban Dudushi, started to air. Both of the programs had their own impact in the beginning and played a crucial role in the history of television in Albania in cultivating a culture of dialogue and debate and entertaining audiences. During their sixteen years of transmission the TV shows have had their developing cycles, rating fluctuations, and a different type of impact and engagement of the audience. Nevertheless, as the media researchers assert, the endurance of the shows is a confirmation of their impact in the media and society¹.

Another typology of long running TV shows that combines information with entertainment in Albania are the *Fiks fare* (2002) and *Stop* (2013) but they are more focused on investigative reporting and cannot be categorized as infotainment talk show.

Since 2013, at least seven late night shows started to air in traditional and other digital platforms that pushed to the limit the boundaries of infotainment talk show subgenre in Albania. The most famous of them was the tabloid talk show *Xing* with Ermal Mamaqi. The program began broadcasting for nearly two seasons in Digitalb TV platform, then, due to its success moved to the national television Klan in 2016. The show continued airing for three seasons with high audience rating until the unexpected retirement “due to the other engagements of the host”.

Free zone and Top show

Free zone (Zonë e lire) with Arian Çani is an infotainment talk show that is broadcasted in national television Klan in Albania. The presenter has his assistant Sofi, DJ Çerri and the director Ledio Topalli, who often plays the

role of the co-host. The show was influenced by the French talk show *Tout Le Monde en Parle* with Thierry Ardisson, aired for eight seasons in France 2 channel. (Figure 1)

Free zone is a show focused on the interviews with public personalities, promotion of new talents and in the host acting skills. The theme of the show depends on the actuality activities and debates. “We are slaves of actuality”, – says Çani, while he asserts that the staff of *Free zone* selects the story that impacts the public interest.



Fig.1, *Free zone* talk show in TV Klan, April 2016 (Source: *Free zone* archive).

The host has created a code of communication with his guests and the public, with a certain meaning, such as “Ledio please!”, referring to the moment when the interviewee asks the director to broadcast a clip or trailer; “Zika” referring to the music or “Terrestrial” referring to the public in and outside the studio, etc. The anchorman also uses his acting skills and gestures as a form of code such as phone communication, facial mimicry, flirting and kissing with some of the show’s guests. According to Arian Çani “without this verbal and non verbal codes there would be no *Free zone*”^a.

Free zone has its general public attending the show but they are not engaged in the public debates or discussions. The director of the show claims that “the criterion of their selection is only their physical appearance”^b. Each of them is paid four euro to attend and follow the show for nearly four hours².

Meanwhile, *Top show* with Alban Dudushi is an infotainment talk show which has constantly evolved over time. In the first season aired in 2003-2004, the concept of the show was a vertical communication, without public interaction. The philosophy was reflected even in the studio scenography which was like a theatre where the guests were on the stage while the public was downstairs.

After that, the program has shifted to a horizontal communication concept. The host Alban Dudushi says that the studio scenery is based on the theory of “agora”, where the debaters stand in the center and the public all around

them. “We have advanced the linear form of communication to an interactive one”, Dudushi points out^c.

The improvisation of assembly in television aims to create the idea of a large forum where the audience and the public personalities are equal. According to the anchorman the positions of the guests are not predefined for two reasons: first, the show aimed to break the classic face-to-face debate of the guests; Secondly, it coincides with the concept of the program according to which the purpose of the show is not just in spectacle, but in the rational arguments.

Xing: Sexism and exhibitionism as spectacle

On November 3, 2019, the anchorman Ermal Mamaqi invited to the *Xing* show for an interview the blogger Nas Daily and his girlfriend, Alyne. During the conversation, as it always happens in this spectacle, the moderator calls the co-host of this show to ask a new question to the guests. Ermal Mamaqi starts joking with his colleague Kejvina Kthella’s sex appeal, while on the other side she acted as she had forgotten the question:

Ermal: *Nas, do not look at her, because of her breast.*

Nas: *Ok, I’ll not!*

Alyne: *What did he say?*

Nas: *Don’t look at her.*

Alyne: *Why not?*

Kejvina: *Do you travel to meet other girls, Nas?*

Alyne: *This is so inappropriate. And it’s not funny.*

Ermal: *This is funny!*

Alyne: *This is not funny! Disrespecting women is not funny.*

Nas: *It’s ok.*

Alyne starts crying: *It’s not ok! My Facebook channel is about women’s rights... In Albania, like in some other countries in the Balkans treat women like shit! They treat them like objects! They treat them like sex objects!*^d (Figure 2)

Some days after the show Alyne posted a video on her blog “Dear Alyne” where she explained this unusual situation, explaining that “*using sexist language to gain attention and using women as objects is not ok*”^e.

Using the female sensuality to gain audience is considered one of the main problems of this tabloid talk show. This tendency was noticed since the first season of

^a Interview with the talk show *Free zone* anchorman, Arian Çani, August 30, 2014.

^b Interview with the talk show *Free zone* director, Ledio Topalli, September 4, 2014.

^c Interview with the talk show *Top show* host, Alban Dudushi, April 24, 2014.

^d Tabloid talk show *Xing* with Ermal Mamaqi, interview with Nas Daily, November 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGJ0R5vbpaE>, visited October 10, 2019.

^e *After the incident in Xing: Alyne shows what happened before broadcasting and not just*, Published by Anabel Magazine, November 18, 2018, <https://www.anabelmagazine.com/news/39369/after-the-incident-in-xing-alyne-shows-what-happened-before-broadcasting-and-not-just/eng/>, visited October 9, 2019.



Fig. 2, Xing talk show in TV Klan, November 3, 2018 (Source: Xing you tube).

this show in TV Klan, but it became more evident after the replacement of the co-host of the spectacle. During her first presentation, Kejvina Kthella appeared very provocative, without real substance. During the season the host constantly humorously highlights her colleague's "ignorance", while appreciating her sensuality. This is considered as a spectacle technique to get more audience^f.

The social media has played a huge impact in determining the quality of the discourse that takes place in the studio. *Xing me* Ermal Mamaqi often promotes mediocre characters in prime time only because they have reached a certain level of audience in the online media, without any real contribution or value in our society. During the June 1, 2019 episode, the anchorman of the show invited the candidate for the Municipality of Këlcyrë, Hasbi Kasaj, only because he cursed his constituents to get more votes. The interview in prime time with this character lasted one hour, though the level of discussion was mediocre^g.

Analyzing one of the successful TV shows, semiotician and philosopher Umberto Eco has argued that "television promotes mediocre people" because the specialized messages and ideas are not immediately assimilated by the audience³.

Meanwhile, Giovanni Sartori points out that TV hosts reserve a lot of time to "promote extravagance". According to him, journalists and television anchormen are constantly looking for exciting stories related to violence, sex or pseudo-intellectuals⁴. Sartori also criticizes the way the journalists report on cases of violence, demonstrations and aggressive attacks. The researcher points out that "rather than dealing with the substance, journalist and TV presenter gather and report facts in the form of spectacle"⁴.

On the other hand, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu asserts that the anchorperson is in constant search of sensational events, known as the three "S's", Sesso-Sangue-Soldi (sex-blood-money). This is the favorite fast food of the media, especially the tabloid genres, pushing the event to the extreme, providing the public with stories similar to soap operas⁵.

Conclusions

TV talk shows in Albania started developing after the fall of communism in 1990, and especially after the creation of private television stations in mid- and late '90s. Talk show infotainment subgenres in Albania were created and aired in 2003. *Free zone* with Arian Çani and *Top Show* with Alban Dudushi are the longest running TV programs of this kind and they are still aired in two national televisions in Albania, TV Klan and Top Channel.

While *Top show* with Alban Dudushi is more focused in promoting debate, *Free zone* with Arian Çani is a more controversial show trying to push the information and discourse to the limits of ethics to gain audience. Talk show *Free zone* has often been the object of analysis within the academic circles and was considered the show that contributed the most to the development the infotainment genre.

Xing with Ermal Mamaqi pushed the infotainment subgenre to an extreme level of ethics, creating the tabloid talk show or trash talk show in Albania. The main purpose of the program was reaching the highest audience rating promoting sexism, exhibitionism and mediocre television discourse as a form of spectacle.

Social media has a huge impact on tabloid talk show *Xing* with Ermal Mamaqi. It often promotes mediocre characters in prime time only because they have reached a certain level of audience in the online media, without any real contribution or value in our society.

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^f Ermal Mamaqi, *New co-host surprises everybody*, Tabloid talk show Xing with Ermal Mamaqi, October 21, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rae46Bc2sM>, visited October 10, 2019.

^g Tabloid talk show *Xing with Ermal Mamaqi*, interview with Hasbi Kasaj, June 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_OWuo7xuHA, visited October 10, 2019.

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RAZVOJ KASNONOĆNIH TV EMISIJA U ALBANIJI: OD INFOZABAVE DO TRASH PROGRAMA

SAŽETAK

Utjecaj novih društvenih medija na publiku obvezuje tradicionalnu televiziju da se prilagodi novoj kulturi TV konzumacije. S namjerom da generiraju novu publiku, naviknutu na veliku količinu informacija na društvenim mrežama, više orijentiranima na lažne nego na stvarne vijesti, spektakle i kulturu konzumacije, a ne na informacije koje utječu na javno mnijenje, TV žanrovi mijenjaju svoje fleksibilne granice iz infozabavnog talk showa u trash show. Koji su to novi TV formati koji se pojavljuju na albanskoj televiziji? Kako su stvoreni? Što utječe na njih? Kako su organizirani i kakve teme predlažu publici? Jesu li intervjui unaprijed programirani ili su spontani? Kakva je tipologija njihovih gostiju? Da li komuniciraju s publikom u studiju? Jesu li pitanja njihovih sljedbenika na društvenim mrežama uključena u intervju? Gore navedena pitanja i druga pitanja analizirat će se u ovom radu. Rad je usredotočen na dvije TV emisije s najvišim ocjenama publike, “Xing me Ermalin” i “Zonë e lirë”, koje su emitirane na nacionalnoj televiziji, Klan. Metodologija ovog rada temelji se na analizi podataka i TV programa, procesu praćenja društvenih medija i intervjuima s voditeljima, gostima i medijskim stručnjacima.