Trust and News Media in the Age of Misinformation: The Case of the Western Balkans

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(Ph.D., University of Tennessee, USA) is an Associate Professor in the College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia, USA. Dr. Pjesivac’s research focuses on international and cross-cultural communication, media trust and credibility, and effects of digital news content. In the area of media trust and credibility, she has examined the factors and processes that impact news credibility and trust, with the special focus on media systems in Eastern Europe. She published more than 20 research articles in prominent academic journals, and had around 50 presentations at national and international conferences. Dr. Pjesivac’s research has won recognitions from various organizations, including the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the International Communication Association (ICA), the Broadcast Education Association (BEA), and the Online News Association (ONA). Before receiving her Ph.D., Dr. Pjesivac worked in Serbia as a journalist, and covered, among other things, war crimes trials at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, the Netherlands.

Abstract:
In recent years, varying levels of trust in news media have been noted in different countries, jeopardizing news media’s ability to inform the citizens and monitor the work of the governments. Simultaneously, the proliferation of so-called “fake news,” misinformation, and disinformation particularly in the online arena, imposed new challenges for traditional news media organizations and trust in them. Countries of the Western Balkans, where historically, confidence in institutions and news media has been low, have been hit especially hard with the epidemic of misinformation. This lecture will analyze current state of affairs regarding trust, news media, and misinformation in the Western Balkans, and position them in the context of media’s clientelistic relationship with power structures in the region. It will pay special attention to the importance of trust for democratic societies and shed light on some worrying trends in public’s perceptions of media in the region.

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