



REVIEW

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Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”,

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Member of scientific juri, appointed by Rector of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”,

Order № RD 38/221 – 05.05.2022

Regarding: Dissertation work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Alexandrova Popova on the topic "Audience and Journalism. Social and communication changes in the behavior of the audience and the types of journalism" for the award of a scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Journalism and Media Theory)

I. Presentation of the doctoral candidate based on the submitted documentation

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova is a prominent media expert and a long-time university lecturer in journalism and mass communication. She graduated from 22 "Georgi S. Rakovski" secondary school - humanitarian profile, and a master's degree in journalism at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Doctor of Sociology with a thesis on "The Virtual Man - Social-Communicative Features of the Internet User" (2004) with supervisor Prof. Eliezer Alfandari. She worked as a journalist in BNR, in newspaper "Kultura" and newspaper “K”. She was elected as an associate professor of public communications and information sciences at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University in 2013. She was the head of the "History and Theory of Journalism" department in the period 2017-2020. She is the head of the master's program "Lifestyle journalism" and on the thematic profile "Culture".

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Popova is the author of a number of important and current works dedicated to the media, online journalism, cultural and art journalism, multimedia journalism and a number of other areas related to social networks, social media and the virtual world. She is one of the organizers of the media fair "Journalists in Theory, Journalists in Practice" and one of the compilers of the collections "Journalists in Theory, Journalists in Practice" (2007-2012). For years, she has successfully worked in the field of media theory, Internet, media management, history of foreign journalism, etc. She is the author of a number of books such as "Introduction to Journalism Theory" (2021, 2012), "The Virtual Man. Social-Communicative Features of the Internet User" (2021, 2012, 2005), "The Media Person"



(2019), "Theoretical Aspects of the Media" (2014). Co-author of books such as "The words of the media transition" (2010), "Digital media" (2012), "Media in Europe" (2012), "Reforms and social change" (2016), "Journalistic professions. Status and dynamics in Bulgaria" (2010-2011). She has published numerous scholarly studies and articles in leading scholarly journals and collections in the fields of journalism, the Internet, media theory, and media arts. Her writings are of great interest to lecturers, researchers, journalists and students of journalism. Just as an example, I will point out that her scientific article "Media Audience and Social Change", published in the theoretical e-journal with an international editorial board "Media and Public Communications" has been read 10212 times so far!

The report on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements under Art. 26 of ZRASRB (scientific area 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional direction 3.5. Public communications and information sciences) shows as follows - 50 points (group of indicators A), 100 points (group of indicators B), 150 points (group of indicators D), 160 points (group of indicators D) or a total of 460 points, which are sufficient for the purposes of the procedure. This brief recapitulation is unequivocally indicative of the applicant's qualities and productivity.

II. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

1. Relevance of the topic.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova offers to the attention of the scientific jury a very up-to-date, conceptual and valuable work, dedicated to an extremely key segment in modern media studies - the audience and journalism. For the most part, previous studies or simply spontaneous analyzes and comments on this topic have been one-sided, superficial or too fragmentary, and many of them already out of fashion - a finding that further emphasizes the need for such a fundamental scientific text. Among all other reasons, this thesis is justified and timely also because of the extreme radicalization and activation of media audiences in the globalized public sphere – a logical result of changing civic thinking and civic behavior in the context of the detonating role of social networks and social media.

2. Structure and volume.

The dissertation is structured in an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and an application in a total volume of 465 computer-formatted pages. The bibliography includes a total of 363 sources, of which 209 are in Cyrillic, 154 are in Latin, two own representative sociological studies were conducted using the method of content analysis and one representative sociological study of our own, jointly with the media analysis agency "Perceptica" using the method of media analysis, as well as an in-depth interview with three journalists from a leading media in order to identify the peculiarities of news production, 4 tables, 47 figures and 19 images are included.



3. Aims, Object, Subject and Content.

The author has clearly fixed her main research goal: to analyze and interpret the social and communication behavior of the audience (and more specifically, the active audience) - the one that personally participates in the process of creating, sharing and evaluating information in the media environment. Quite rightly, a point of reference is marked in goal setting, according to which the media person is increasingly virtual, and the virtual person is even more civically aware and socially reflexive, causing significant changes in journalism, the emergence of new variants, specifics and media forms.

The **object (the modern recipient)** and the **subject (changes in journalism influenced by new technological discoveries)** of the dissertation are clearly and unambiguously formulated. The three main hypotheses regarding changes in audience behavior (not only social but also communication changes) and journalistic models are clearly presented.

The **first chapter**, titled "**Changes in Audience Behavior - Consumer, Prosumer, Active Audience**" rightly turns the research eyepiece on definitive audience parameters and variants; the changes in the behavior of the active audience; the specifics of the user; the specifics and features of the prosumer; the characteristic of the authorized user.

The **second chapter** is focused on another extremely important segment of the correlation audience - journalism "**Citizen participation in the media - citizen journalism**". Here we should admire the way in which Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova defines civic participation in the media, but also express approval for the remaining paragraphs and subsections of the chapter, resp.: the media theory of civic participation; culture of participation and culture of convergence; citizen journalism; citizen journalism and professional media; citizen journalism and citizen-journalists; characteristics of citizen journalism; alternative and participatory media, etc.

"**Forms of participation in media production - participatory journalism**" is the title of the **third chapter**. The way in which participatory journalism, its forms, degrees, problems, the roles of professional and non-professional journalists in participatory journalism, and the trends of its development are considered deserves high praise. This chapter also presents the results of our own sociological research, dedicated to the manifestation of participatory journalism in Bulgarian television.

Impressively and convincingly, the author develops her analysis in the **fourth chapter**, "**Importance of dialogicity and visualization on the Internet — multimedia journalism and network journalism**." Its content and structuring are another testimony to the good interpretive qualities of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Popova, as some of the most essential trends, problems and research inventions are professionally and convincingly brought out here. In this chapter, the author's attention is not only focused on the very important definitions of multimedia journalism, its types and manifestations, but also on the essence and features of network journalism, as well as its characteristics. The results of our own sociological research are presented, which observes the reactions of the online audience to



media publications within three significant thematic areas - social, institutional and educational problems.

The last - fifth chapter, "Emotions in the media - good news, constructive journalism and journalism for solutions" quite specifically and with the ambition of comprehensiveness directs attention to emotions in the media (differentiated into mediatization and emotions and affects), emotions in the news (with a specific view on emotional labor and objectivity as a counterpoint to emotionality); the good and bad news in the media; positive emotions; constructive journalism; journalism about decisions (including its peculiarities). The results of our own sociological research are presented, which observes the reactions of the Bulgarian television audience to the presentation of good news and positive stories in the broadcasts of the Bulgarian television media.

The conclusion is condensed and logically deduced from the line and logic of research thought.

III. Dissertation Research Contributions

My impression of this dissertation is excellent and I am optimistic about its future. I share the critical words of the author that "... Media production continues to be closed in the hands of the professional Bulgarian media, which do not allow the intervention of users in determining the place and nature of the content, its editing, driven by the desire to preserve established journalistic standards and news models. This prevents the Bulgarian media from pointing out the real problems of the country and participating in their solution. The existing civil and alternative media, which are independent enough to register an up-to-date content model with a lower degree of market orientation, have a more limited influence on the public agenda." (p. 423).

I cannot fail to express my complete satisfaction with the conscientious and qualitative implementation of the recommendations in my review for the internal defense of the dissertation work and, more specifically, the complete rethinking and restructuring of the dissertation in order to build greater density and semantic continuity. As well as enriching the bibliography with additional sources. And also, the editing and refinement of the requested contributions, so as to outline their originality more clearly and concisely, to reduce the descriptiveness and to strengthen the conceptual definiteness in them.

Contributions are fairly arranged and systematized. I recognize their importance and legitimacy, and I will especially emphasize the most important thing in them: they are a definite request for the enrichment and development of the existing media theory and media education.



IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

On the topic of the dissertation, 13 articles, studies and participation in a collective monograph have been published, which cover a large part of the topics in the dissertation work. Six of the presented articles and studies present some of the results of their own sociological research: "Journalism for decisions - a model of critical and control function" ("Quality journalism and a new communication environment", FJMC, SU "St. Kl. Ohridski", S., 2021), "The role of the good news in Bulgaria: a positive model for personal development and social prosperity" ("Communication Management: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century", S., UI "St. Kl. Ohridski", 2020), "Multimedia journalism in the Bulgarian television and online media" (Medialog, issue 8/2020), "Online journalism - civic content in social media" (Yearbook of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, 27/2020), "Participatory Journalism in Bulgarian TV News" (Media of the 21st century, 12.02.2020) and "From journalism for the user to journalism for the user" ("Media and journalism - the professional standards between power and money. Effective management of the independent media", FJMC, 2019, as well as Media of the 21st century, 19.01.2019).

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, I will point out that proposals for the defense **dissertation work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova on the topic "Audience and Journalism. Social and communication changes in the behavior of the audience and types of journalism" for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" is scientifically sound, modern, well-argued and extremely competently written.** Its dissertation ability and scientific value are beyond any doubt. I congratulate the author for her dedicated work, effective approach and last but not least – for the scientific and creative courage in writing her work. Dissertations of this type only reinforce the reputation of the History and Theory of Journalism Department (and the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication in general) as an intellectual and conceptual center and community successfully engaged in the development of fundamental media, journalism and communication topics and problems. **All this gives me the reason to propose to the respected scientific jury to vote for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" to Maria Alexandrova Popova in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Journalism and Media Theory).**

Date: 08.07.2022

Reviewer: Prof. D.Sc. Lubomir Stoykov