



REVIEW

from Prof. DSc Petranka Fileva, retired

On the dissertation work "Audience and journalism. Social and communication changes in the behavior of the audience and the types of journalism"

Presented by PhD Assot. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the field of science 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Theory of Journalism and Media.)

Presentation of the candidate

Assoc. Dr. Maria Popova graduated with a master's degree in journalism at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2004, she received the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Sociology with a dissertation on the topic "Virtual man. Social and Communicational features of Internet User" (2005). In 2013, she held the academic position of Associate Professor of Public Communications and Information Sciences at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University. She teaches the disciplines " Theory of Journalism and Media", " Theory of Media", "Art Journalism" and "Art and Media".

She is the author of the books "Introduction to journalistim theory" (2021), "The virtual man. Social and communication features of the Internet user" (2021), "The media man" (2019), "Theoretical aspects of the media" (2014), "Journalism theory" (2012), "The virtual man" (2005, 2012). Co-author and editor of books such as "Media in Europe" (2012), "Words of the Media Transition" (2010), "Digital Media" (2012), "Reforms and Social Change" (2016). Author of numerous articles, studies and publications in the field of journalism and media theory. They are noted 29 citations or reviews in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals.

Assoc. Dr. Maria Popova leads the Master's program "Lifestyle Journalism" and thematic profile "Culture". She was a head of the Department "History and Theory of Journalism", FJMK. She is Member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists and of the editorial board of the scientific online magazine "Media of the 21st Century" (Newmedia21.eu).

Assessment of the qualities of the dissertation text

A serious in-depth work has been brought to our attention in a volume of 465 pages and contains: introduction, five chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendix. The bibliography includes a total of 363 sources, of which 209 in Cyrillic and 154 in Latin.

The dissertation presents the connection between the changes in the behavior of the audience and some newer forms in journalism, developing as open and mutually influencing subsystems. The factors of influence in the clearly expressed two-way interconnections are sought in the same field - of technological and social changes. The rich theoretical overview, accompanied by summaries and analysis, contains a lot of new information and sufficient scientific contributions in the field of journalism theory and communication science.

Three clearly formulated hypotheses relating to the observed social and communication changes in audience behavior and journalistic production patterns have been proven. Changes in consumer behavior affect the functions of journalism - for example, its power function is divided or diluted; objective or neutral coverage of events is influenced by the emotional



perception on the part of the audience, imposed to a large extent on social media. The participation of the active audience is a prerequisite for adapting the media and journalism to the changed environment. As a result of the recipient's new active position, changes occur in journalism.

Various theoretical methods are used in the dissertation. Extensive scientific literature is analyzed. In order to empirically test the derived scientific hypotheses, the dissertation presents and analyzes three own representative sociological studies, which aim to monitor the activity of the Bulgarian media audience and its participation in the process of media production. With the help of an in-depth interview with three leading Bulgarian journalists, it is confirmed that the intensified dialogue with consumers allows the media to promote many more opinions and positions on the topics and issues covered.

The structure of the dissertation is logical and helps to gradually prove the proposed hypotheses. **The first chapter** of the dissertation is dedicated to the media audience, defined by the mixing characteristics of a prosumer, a former audience, an empowered user. **The second chapter** focuses on the return of the citizen in the media field, not only through social networks, but also thanks to proactive journalism as a subsystem. In the **third chapter** of the dissertation the user roles, through which the journalism of the participation is manifested, are outlined with arguments, with examples. **The fourth chapter** outlines the main characteristics of both multimedia and network journalism, including comments on changes in the behavior of journalists and newsrooms, in distribution channels. The **fifth chapter** of the dissertation examines the processes of mediatization of emotions, insofar as the increased emotional expression in the media is a response to the fatigue of the audience from the predominantly negative content.

The media man and virtual man come to the fore, he is the subject of research in a series of works by the author. He is in a state of constant involvement in dialogic communication in shifting layers of influence and power, often involved in a machine-generated environment, but from the point of view of the media themselves rather involved in market relations. His new manifestation is as an accomplice in media production, as a prosumer born in social networks and in the network society, with the potential to participate in the knowledge-based economy, to create and share in the personal and professional field.

It follows logically the profiling of the virtual man in his appearances as a citizen, known for centuries, illustrated by the author with many historical examples, where the publishers are rather the proactive participant in the communication channel. In the conditions of the Internet, after a stage of professionally closed journalism, this active manifestation of the citizens is fueled by a culture of participation in a multimedia environment and by the gradual opening of newsrooms to the resource of witnesses and experts, to blogs and social networks.

The authorized consumer appears, fascinated by the availability of the Internet and the established model of the gift, where he himself participates both as a consumer and as a prosumer. Against this background, the author presents new types of journalism, based on participation and dialogue, on the changed structure of the news story or influenced by the recipients and their social networks stories, emotionally loaded and rejecting the neutral and purely objective presentation.

The **relevance** of the dissertation is determined by the choice to observe the dynamic technological changes and the resulting diverse social transformations in modern media



systems. The **significance**, in my opinion, lies in the analysis of the changes taking place in this environment in contemporary journalism, caused by the activity of the audience, by the developing culture of civic participation.

The dissertation impresses with the depth and comprehensiveness of the study of theoretical sources. It upgrades more or less known theoretical formulations, comparison and grouping according to matching statements.

The first example could be the observation of the audience's behavior and its connections with the media. Referring to Denis McQuail's cogitations about the passive audience, which is rather a collection of individuals without connections between them, the author assesses the changes in the new technological environment and concludes that "with the establishment of new media, new forms of behavior emerge for an already fully active audience, including interactivity, multimedia, personalization and fluidity of content "(p.30). The media man is included in the media consumption, but it is difficult to be arranged him in a clearly defined segment. He is in the process of learning how to use the diverse media, and the media and journalists are learning to accept and eventually manage his active presence. (p. 38).

A second example is the derivation of assessments of the indirect results of the freedom of the active audience to make their media choice in the conditions of the Internet and online communication. Through John Fisk's theory of the active audience, free to perceive, interpret and reject what is proposed in the media field, then with Burkart's interpretations in the user-satisfaction scheme of how difficult it is to determine the active user's media choice, the author comes to an assessment and critique of the nature of the free exchange, leading to the transformation of the user into a direct object of media sale.

Such an approach of skillful interpretation of established theories in the field of media economics and media marketing allows the author to defend the consideration of members of the active audience as a consumer and prosumer, able to make decisions, to participate in gradual changes of power in relations with the media. However, it is also appropriate to conclude that large media and technology companies operating on a global scale are interfering in the changing positions of power, in conditions of erased traditional community ties.

The author successfully uses the conclusions of less known or less established authors to enrich her analysis with terms such as former audience or to fully present the media story created by the active online audience as „highly fragmented, multiple as a medium of interpretation, polyphonic as inhabiting figures, often spontaneous and situational as a means of evaluation”.

Against the background of recognized and further developed by the author observations that the power over the media and through the media is transformed into the power of consumers through media platforms and networks, the question is what journalism becomes, is there still a need for it. The answer is, in short, that journalism remains essentially the same, but the conditions under which it is practiced have changed. Adaptation takes place along the lines of new variants of journalism and new social roles for contemporary journalists.

Finally, perhaps the most significant novelty in the dissertation are the three groups of a new type of journalism presented by the author, which have received specific names in the scientific literature. The first group can be read as journalism, responding to changes in audience behavior. Here are citizen journalism, participatory journalism or co-participation



journalism. The second group is formed including due to changes in the production process and the distribution channel, here are the multimedia journalism and network journalism. The third group I personally read more as journalism with claims to influence the processes of transformation and modernization of society - constructive journalism and solutions journalism - influenced, among other factors, by the emotional load of the Internet environment.

These topics are developed in three separate chapters with a rich set of statements and references, own analysis and conclusions. The main hypotheses have been proven, including with own empirical studies. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the in-depth theoretical overview and analysis in presenting the characteristics of citizen journalism, which through a culture of participation enriches or restores the role of journalism and the media in social development.

Contributions to the dissertation research

For the first time, the process of adaptation of modern journalism to the changes in the environment - caused by both dynamic technological changes and diversified social transformations - is studied so comprehensively and thoroughly. A change is outlined in the mission and goals of modern journalism, in the character and roles of the participants in the creation of media content, following the changes in the behavior and expectations of the audience, changes in information channels, increased presence of civic activity in setting the agenda of society.

Building the profile of the audience and rather the active participant in the communication process, is one of the more general contributions of this dissertation. The trends are known, but in this case they are theoretically well substantiated with complementary theses, comparisons and conclusions. And more importantly, the conclusions definitely lead to the analysis of changes in journalism.

As a concrete theoretical contribution, I would confirm the well-defended thesis that the participatory culture is accepted as a product of media convergence, accessibility and diversity of media channels, especially on the Internet, but also as a means for consumer creativity to help producing free-selling content to all interested organizations within the affective economy. Thus, the emergence of new journalistic variants is presupposed, which are in fact the main subject of analysis in the dissertation and can be defined due to combination, analysis and scope as a novelty in the relevant scientific field.

The conclusions in the analysis of the characteristics of citizen journalism and in the analysis of the roles in participatory journalism have a contributing character. The extremely diverse formats of participatory journalism are described in detail, as well as some modern and interesting variants of consumer participation. The main characteristics of network journalism and multimedia approaches are outlined. In order to assess the emotional interpretation in the contemporary news content, the mechanisms for the formation of both good news and bad news are described.

It is important to note the contributory nature of the empirical studies presented in the dissertation. Conclusions are useful for practice in Bulgaria with assessments and ideas about the level of use of participatory journalism and co-participatory journalism in pointing out the real problems of society. It is important to conclude that existing civic media 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 impact on the public agenda.

Notes and recommendations

I can recommend the results of the analysis of new types of journalism to be appropriately schematized and presented in a table revealing the proximity or differences between characteristic features and cited authors. I believe that such a supplement will illustrate one of the main contributions of this dissertation work, will help to highlight the own assessments of the significance of changes in the modern media system.

I would recommend that reflections on the historical relationship between technological changes in communication and the political public environment be supplemented with the tools of the scientific branch of media political economy.

Questions

According to the author, can the development media theory find application in the Bulgarian media environment?

Evaluation of the abstract

I accept the presented abstract, which accurately and completely reflects the content of the dissertation and gives an accurate idea of the purpose, tasks, stages, results of the study. I accept the author's self-assessment of the contributions of the dissertation.

Publications and participation in scientific forums

12 articles and studies have been published, which cover most of the topics in the dissertation. In the third revised edition of the monograph "The Virtual Man. Social - communication features of the Internet user ", current characteristics of the social, communication and media manifestations of the currently dominant media audience have been added. The topics can be found in the 10 books reviewed by Maria Popova, as well as in her participation with reports in scientific forums.

Conclusion

Considering the arguments presented, I am convinced that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova should be awarded the "Doctor of Science" degree in the professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Theory of Journalism and Media.)

Reviewer:
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