

OPINION

for the dissertation work of Associate Professor Dr. Maria Alexandrova Popova "Audience and Journalism. Social and communication changes in the audience's behavior and types of journalism for the award of a scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Theory of Journalism and Media)

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Through the dissertation, **the aim** is to attempt to conceptualize the social and communication behavior of the active audience that participates in creating, sharing, and evaluating information in the media space.

The thesis that is defended is that the participation of active individuals in the creation of media products is carried out by civic-conscious and socially reflexive people who cause significant transformations in modern journalism, contributing to the emergence of new variants, and specifics and creative forms.

A reasonable research **object** of the dissertation is modern active recipients, who go beyond the traditional notion of media consumers as they approach the concepts of professional journalists. The subject of observation by the doctoral student is the changes taking place in journalism, caused by the interactions between new technological discoveries and the development of media devices, by the multiplication of media channels and changes in journalistic behavior, by the introduction of new journalistic forms such as citizen journalism, network journalism, multimedia journalism, constructive journalism, etc.

The main **hypotheses** of the doctoral student refer to the observed social and communication changes in the audience's behavior and the models of journalistic creativity. The first hypothesis proposes that "ideas about the media as centers of power in society or as objects of power control can no longer be so easily related to the field of communication, including views of the media as "gatekeepers" of information and as a major factor in the formation of public opinion. It goes beyond understanding media as guardians of the social responsibility granted to them by society to inform it with reliable information, consolidation, protection of social values and democratic foundations" It is based on the fact that users must learn to check the information

they receive, depending on its source - established media organization, website or online platform.

The second hypothesis asserts that media organizations and journalists, in general, should perceive the audience as a participant in media creativity - from collecting and processing information through its verification, positioning to distribution, and evaluation. User participation is a response to the transformations in modern journalism when it is no longer a one-way process of information transfer. It is considered that the observation of the online user should not be perceived only as part of a certain group formation - mass audience, but to emphasize its personalized manifestation - the medializing person who accepts new roles - prosumer, empowered audience, active audience, citizen -journalist. This, according to Popova, is especially visible on the internet and democratizes the media because non-professional journalists can gain influence and help other points of view to learn about the interests, attitudes, and events that affect people. Thus, the media can identify with its audience. The third hypothesis refers to the changes that occur in journalism as a result of the new active position of the recipients and the emergence of new options - participatory journalism, citizen journalism, multimedia journalism, network journalism, etc.

The tasks that are set for resolution in the dissertation work are relevant to the set goal.

In the *first* chapter, these are: the study of the peculiarities of the media audience, the models for its segmentation and manifestations, the indicators for its typology, the degree of activity or passivity, interactivity or interdependence, the change in the position of journalists, limiting their influence and authority, the modified characteristics in the segmented virtual space, according to specific indicators - social, cultural, personal, psychological factors, degree of involvement, the influence of the market, etc. The particularities of prosumers are explained - people's aspirations to create media products for pleasure or personal use, not for sale. The changes in consumption are studied, given the possibility that each user consumes media information from different personal devices - laptop, mobile phone, tablet, smartwatch. This allowed Dr. Maria Popova to assess the audience as "former" compared to traditional representations and new journalistic variations.

The *second* chapter examines the entry of citizens into the media environment and the extension of the influence of civil society, based on reference to existing media theories and descriptions of citizen journalism.

The *third* chapter explores tasks related to explanations of the features and importance of participatory journalism. Some of the specifics of participatory journalism, such as dialogic and interconnectedness, have been studied and brought out. The various forms of participatory journalism are described in detail - text, audio recordings, videos, collective interviews, writing comments, voting in rankings and polls, participating in forums and discussions, sending mailing lists and newsletters, managing information through smart devices, online patterns such as blogs, wikis, tags, social media posts, music share links, photographs. The main findings are that the media actively "open" their content to user-generated information. The roles through which participatory journalism is manifested are defined.

The *fourth* chapter examines and presents the essence of multimedia journalism, which expresses the creation of diverse media content (audio, video, text, and images), its high degree of visualization, and the possibilities of its distribution on the internet. The features of network journalism are related to the ability of professional journalists, users, local communities, and experts in different fields to work together in producing online content to share facts, form complex connections, and ensure the credibility of the information. Network journalism's main characteristics include interactivity, hypertextuality, multimedia, asynchrony, personalization, decentralization, discussion, and network distribution of information.

In the *fifth* chapter, the processes of the mediatization of emotions are investigated as a response to the audience's fatigue from the predominantly negative content, as well as from the influence of social networks. The media is also explored as a space for manifesting emotional culture, anger, and emotional intelligence. It has been established that knowing the emotional impact of the reactions of affective audiences is useful for journalists because, in their practice, they face both the emotional outbursts of their sources of information and their feelings in media processing. Predominant positive emotions were interpreted, and their manifestation in social networks was sought. Constructive journalism, seeking to transform the news by offering positive stories, has also been observed. Journalism for solutions has been explored, focusing on topics such as mutual aid, volunteering, and good news, and not so much on dramatic or negative information.

Methods. For the development of the dissertation work, a representative sociological study was conducted using a content-analytical method to study the possibilities of the three major Bulgarian television stations - bTV, Nova Television, and BNT to offer products within the framework of participatory journalism. Central news broadcasts were observed in the period between November and December 2018. More than 3,600 news items were examined, of which 133 were identified as a form of participatory journalism. An analysis of media documents

related to the study of the forms of participation of Bulgarian online users in the process of creating media content and the initiation of a public debate on key social, educational and institutional topics in 2019 was also made.

The study covers all online manifestations of Bulgarian media and available public profiles on social networks. Media representations of positive news were also studied.

In 2019, an in-depth interview was also conducted with three leading Bulgarian journalists, who at that time held high positions in the private television bTV - Venelin Petkov, director of "News, current affairs and sports", Gena Traikova, editor-in-chief of "News" and Valya Gizdarska, editor-in-chief of "Current Shows."

It could be stated that all included research ingredients of the dissertation work were studied in detail in the very development of the given chapters in the dissertation work and are a manifestation of a serious academic approach (theoretical and empirical) and the obtained corresponding results. High analytical skills, a wealth of literary sources, relevant scientific literature, an academic style of writing, and a sufficient number of publications on the dissertation topic are revealed.

The **abstract** corresponds to the dissertation.

My assessment of all criteria for writing an opinion is positive.

Contributions

I accept all the presented contributions of Dr. Maria Popova, focusing mainly on the importance of emotions and the derived statement that the media is "a space for the manifestation of emotional culture, anger, emotional intelligence, and emotional labor."

In **conclusion**, I would like to express my opinion that the dissertation work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova is a high academic achievement and I recommend the respected members of the Scientific Jury at the FJMC to vote "Yes" for the awarding of the academic degree "Doctor of Sciences" in Theory of journalism and the media in a professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences.

Member of the Scientific Jury:

Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Stancheva Peycheva

29.06.2022

Sofia