



## OPINION

from Prof. PhD Iliana Pavlova Koleva, "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" University of Veliko Tarnovo,

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in scientific field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Theory of journalism and media).

with a dissertation on the topic: "Audience and journalism. Social and communication changes in the behavior of the audience and the types of journalism",

presented by Maria Alexandrova Popova, Assoc. Prof. PhD in the Department "History and theory of journalism" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

### **I. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text**

The topic of the dissertation "Audience and journalism. Social and communication changes in the behavior of the audience and the types of journalism" is undeniably actual, it covers important aspects of the dynamics and changes in public communications and media that have emerged as a result of technological developments in recent decades. Developed in depth, with precision and a good theoretical basis, the dissertation work contributes to Bulgarian media studies and theory of journalism and reflects important aspects of the changes related to the audience and their behavior, creation and consumption of media content, new forms of journalistic activity etc. The main goal of the dissertation is "*analysis of the social and communicative behavior of the active audience, which takes a personal part in the process of creating, sharing and evaluating information in the media*" (p. 14). To achieve this goal, in the dissertation are used different perspectives and scientific approaches.

The study thoroughly and comprehensively examined a wide range of theoretical sources and systematizes important scientific experience in the field. Structurally, the dissertation consists of 5 chapters, introduction, conclusion, bibliography and appendix. Each of the sections discusses different aspects of changes in audiences and journalism. The first chapter - changes in the behavior of audiences (passive users, prosumers, active authorized users), the second chapter deals with citizenship participation in the media (citizen journalism), the third focuses on citizenship participation in the production of media content, the fourth - interactivity and dialogue in network and multimedia journalism, in the fifth chapter the emphasis is on emotions, constructive journalism and decision journalism.

The appendix (pp. 453 - 465) includes the in-depth interview conducted by the author in 2019 with three leading Bulgarian journalists in high editorial positions in the private television bTV. The aim of the interview is to deepen the understanding of journalistic work



and outline the transformational mechanisms in the profession in the changed media and communication environment, with an active citizen audience, social media and networks.

Three media researches were also carried out with a significant contribution to the dissertation work: (1.) Research by the method of content analysis, referring to the manifestations of participatory journalism; the object is the central news programs of the three leading Bulgarian television channels - the private bTV, Nova TV and the first channel of the public BNT in the period November - December 2018 (pp. 241 - 257); (2.) Media research of network journalism and the interaction between journalists and the audience in traditional and online media, conducted by the media analysis agency "Perceptica" in 2019 by order of the author (pp. 290 - 342); (3.) In connection with the role of emotions is the media research of good news, the main object is the column "We believe in the good", which is broadcast every week in the central news program of the private Bulgarian television bTV for six years. The method is content analysis (pp. 385 - 394).

The results of the three researches, as well as the in-depth interviews, show the development of Bulgarian journalism and form one of the main conclusions of the dissertation: *"Despite of the criticism of its backwardness, lack of transparency of media ownership and independence, low level of freedom of speech, active consumer participation helps it to follow general media trends"* (p. 422).

The three main hypotheses of the dissertation are confirmed - the weakened position of the media and journalism in society, the increased role of consumers as participants in the process of creation of journalistic content and the changes that occur in journalism as a result of the new active position of the recipient.

The bibliography to the dissertation (pp. 426 - 452) includes 363 bibliographic units of used and cited literature of Bulgarian and foreign authors.

The dissertation is 465 pages long. The abstract presents its content correctly.

## **II. Contributions of the dissertation research**

I fully support the contributions noted in the dissertation. The dissertation rightly shares the understanding that in the field of public communications (and in particular journalism) the tendency is from content creation to context building (p. 81). Permanent changes are being formed in the media organization of the journalism culture - more and more actively oriented online organizational structures, forms of cooperation and interaction with the audience are being established, the dialogic media production is formed with possibilities for personalization of the content and with engaging the attention of small targeted communities.

The dissertation contributes to the study of the Bulgarian media model in terms of participatory journalism. As it shows the results of the conducted research *"participatory journalism is well integrated in the content of the news programs of the two private Bulgarian televisions bTV and Nova TV and partly in the news program of the public BNT1... At this stage, however, the use of multiple methods in evaluating and selecting forms of participatory journalism is not noticeable, they always go through additional editorial verification and processing. Journalists still play traditional professional roles, and consumers are perceived*



*mainly as sources of information or creators of interesting stories to serve as an occasion or supplement to journalistic products” (p. 255).*

As a contribution to the Bulgarian media studies and the theory of journalism, I highlight the fourth chapter of dissertation, which examines emotions and their relationship to the modern model of media production and media consumption. The emphasis on the theoretical concept of constructing the so-called "Emotional work" allows the problem to be considered through the prism of the relation objectivity - emotionality in the media.

The dissertation contributes to the imposition of the concepts of "constructive journalism" and "decision journalism" in the Bulgarian media studies.

I fully share the conclusion that today we are witnessing the upgrading of different types of journalism activities, as well as the emergence of new variations: *"Citizen journalism is evolving into alternative and activism journalism, contextualized journalism, decision journalism, online journalism is being modified into variable journalism and network journalism, mostly Internet-based forms of participatory journalism and multimedia journalism"* (pp. 416 - 417).

### **III. Notes and recommendations**

I recommend the dissertation to be published in order to reach more readers.

As a direction for future research and deepening the study in the field of media and journalism theory I have question related to the main assumption of the dissertation: *"The media man is increasingly virtual, and the virtual man is even more citizen aware and socially reflective"* (pp. 14). Is it because of the technological connectivity (sometimes perceived as a natural connectivity with hundreds of thousands of "friends", the connection with which at any moment can be broken), we do not see just the opposite trend, which is increasingly emerging - rapidly disintegrated communities, weakened awareness of fundamental principles of civil society, weakened social reflection, and all this as a consequence of the process of communications' personalization and building social networks (audiences) around the individuals?

### **IV. Conclusion**

Given the noted qualities of the dissertation "Audience and journalism. Social and communication changes in the behavior of the audience and the types of journalism" **I express my positive attitude and support to Maria Alexandrova Popova in obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the scientific field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Theory of journalism and media).**

4.07.2022