

OPINION

From: Prof. Dr. Margarita Pesheva, VFU

For: Acquisition of the educational and scientific "Doctor of Sciences" degree in the field of science 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Journalism and Media Theory) 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:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Alexandrova Popova, free doctoral student in the Department of History and Theory of Journalism at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

I. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

The dissertation very thoroughly examines a very important problem in modern media theory. It refers to social and communicative changes in the behavior and structure of the audience, and the emergence of radically different types of journalism. We are witnessing a radical change in the behavior of the audience, the emergence of new forms of its participation in the process of media production, which gives rise to completely new types of journalism - citizen, multimedia, network, constructive, decision journalism and more.

The dissertation respects with the wide range of used theoretical sources. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova presents a very serious scientific study, which has an impressive volume of 465 pages, which includes Introduction, 5 chapters, conclusion and bibliography. The bibliography contains 363 sources, of which 209 in Cyrillic and 154 in Latin. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Popova has conducted several author's sociological research on the method of content analysis, and in-depth interviews with three leading journalists, which thoroughly examine the transformations of news, due to the very rapid development of numerous digital practices. The dissertation text is illustrated with 4 tables, 47 figures and 19 images. This broad theoretical framework contains a very competent and in-depth scientific analysis of a very important research problem.

The dissertation introduces new forms of participation in the production of media events and information. The author explores some legal definitions, forms and development of participatory journalism. And above all - its specific forms in the news of the three national TV programs, which are considered with the help of various research tools. Participatory journalism is presented through text, audio recordings, videos, writing comments, voting in rankings and polls, participating in forums and discussions, creating mailing lists, newsletters, managing information through smart devices, blogs, wikis, tags, posts in social networks, links for sharing various media content, etc. The scientific analysis is upgraded with numerous facts from new digital practices that allow the formulation of professionally convincing scientific conclusions.

The dissertation offers an original analysis of multimedia and network journalism. The author examines multimedia journalism in great detail and depth, which creates rich media content (audio, video, text, images, etc.). She especially emphasizes the news packages that offer the modern consumer a huge amount of information in various media formats, which are sent to him through traditional and digital media channels. The great expansion of the media field completely changes the work of the journalistic editorial office, creates conditions for the development of new journalistic professions and the imposition of teamwork, which requires much higher professional competencies in the digital field, greater communication and interaction.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova discusses in detail the joint production of online content, journalists as its creators, local communities and experts who share facts and events, and to some extent ensure the accuracy of information. The professional role of the journalist today is radically different - it is mainly his skills to create and develop network contacts. The modern journalist creates online content on a daily basis, he is relatively independent - from the media and the traditional connections in the journalistic editorial office. The author draws attention to the need to expand the professional attitude of the modern journalist, develop his skills to use and apply numerous digital tools for constant contact with the active audience online, which is constantly looking for quality and verified information, and (in principle) rejects fake news and manipulations. In the new digital practices, the professional journalist competes daily with the citizen-journalist, and this competition is very difficult, and the victory is not always on the side of traditional journalism.

The dissertation introduces a complex methodology in scientific analysis, which uses methods and indicators taken from different scientific fields - media studies, sociology of media, media psychology, media marketing, journalistic theory, online journalism and others. Placing scientific analysis in such a broad methodological framework gives a serious added value to this dissertation - through the richness of research, theoretical and practical conclusions.

The dissertation offers an author's classification and interpretation of many different research theories, concepts, sociological research conducted by the method of content analysis and media analysis.

The empirical study of the central news programs of the three national TV programs BNT, bTV and Nova in the period November-December 2018, there are 3,600 news items for the research base, of which 133 can be classified as participatory journalism. Through numerous empirical data, the author proves that the two commercial television programs with national coverage are the most active in the distribution and promotion of user-generated content, they maintain active communication with the audience through online platforms, and constantly monitor the traffic of consumer materials of the most interesting of them. The theoretical analysis performed by the author is supplemented and enriched with the empirical results of several sociological studies, which empirically confirm the theoretical conclusions and generalizations.

The dissertation offers a scientifically sound approach to the collection, processing and analysis of empirical data, in accordance with the rules and requirements of empirical sociology. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova discusses in detail the main consumer formats in the three national television programs in our country - funny videos with social or other content, photos and posts that are distributed daily on the Web. She also draws attention to the strong predominance of negative news on the Web, which constantly tells stories of aggression, murders, cases of corruption, etc.

The dissertation achieves several very important scientific contributions, which are based on in-depth and competent theoretical analysis and conducted empirical sociological research. The author, together with the Perceptica agency, in the period 2019, using the method of media analysis, monitors the online activities of the Bulgarian media and their profiles on social networks. Facebook remains the most preferred social network by Bulgarian users. The leading form of their online participation is sharing (post, link, photography, video, etc.). News programs are dominated by consumer information, with major television programs more often using web pages rather than personal profiles - it is difficult to verify the accuracy of a piece of information. The empirical research mainly examines the behavior of the active audience with the help of various social indicators, which monitor how effectively social institutions work, what is the degree of their sensitivity to citizens' problems, what are the deficits in the education system and others.

The dissertation shows the excellent bibliographic awareness of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova. She cites many studies in Bulgarian, English and Russian. Her bibliography shows that she knows very well the works of a number of famous researchers at home and abroad. The dissertation is fully compliant with the compositional and content requirements for a doctoral dissertation. It is excellently composed - contains an Introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and appendices. Each individual chapter is structured by main problems and logically ends with a summary and conclusions.

The dissertation is written in excellent Bulgarian, it does not deviate from the literary, grammatical, spelling and punctuation rules. The text of the abstract fully meets the requirements for a dissertation.

The abstract gives a detailed summary of all chapters of the dissertation, presents its main purpose, object and subject of research, leading hypotheses, main conclusions and scientific contributions.

II. Contributions to the dissertation research

The dissertation has several main contributions that develop and build on basic concepts in media theory, and create appropriate conditions for the introduction of new media practices.

The first scientific contribution is the professionally convincing theoretical analysis of the segmentation of the media audience, in accordance with several main factors - expanding the social context in the digital environment, dependence of the audience on various digital formats that exist in network environment, market positioning of the audience from the demand and supply of media products, the profiling of the audience according to its social and demographic profile. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova studies the audience in the context of many different vectors - passive and active audience; from the point of view of the user and the prosumer, from the point of view of its interactivity and localization of the individual users in the digital space, etc. A comprehensive analysis of the content profile of the audience in the new digital environment allows us to understand what kind of journalism it really needs? And to what extent the digital user is really "complicit" in creating completely new forms of online journalism forms.

The second scientific contribution is the expansion and enrichment of existing theories and scientific classifications in the field of journalism. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova presents scientific arguments for new types of journalism - multimedia journalism, network journalism, participatory journalism, constructive journalism, decision journalism. It analyzes in depth the emergence and development of new types of online journalism, depending on the active participation of modern media users in the creation and distribution of the journalistic product. Mostly due to the extreme democratization of media technologies, which allow the creation and distribution of journalistic content at any time, in any place, and on various online platforms, numerous hybrid forms of journalism are emerging every day in the new online environment. The media audience already has a strong consumer attitude to create and distribute journalistic content, to constantly participate in the construction of the new citizen journalism, which is independent of the government and the journalistic editorial office, it is a product of civic energy and activity on the Web. Today, the online environment is enriched and expanded daily with numerous hybrid forms of journalism in which professional journalists and citizen journalists begin to work together, and with joint efforts to produce media content that often fights unequal battle with fake news and online propaganda.

The third scientific contribution is to bring to the forefront the mediatization of emotions, a kind of "emotional packaging" of media messages, which arises from the increased hate on social networks, the avalanche of negative news, the rapid growth of "electronic garbage", which is very polluting media environment, and causes great consumer fatigue and

frustration. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova rightly emphasizes the wide dissemination of users' emotions on social networks, where their behavior and emotional reactions become a new public norm. Digital media is proving to be a vast space for building a new emotional culture that completely rethinks the territory and the boundaries between the personal and the public. The author rightly believes that digital media builds a radically different emotional culture of the modern consumer, cultivates a new emotional intelligence in him, but also creates a very strong "mediatized anger", which has its serious social causes. The emotional definition of journalistic messages on the Web changes their content and context, enhances their expressiveness and impact on the truly vast audience of the Web.

The fourth scientific contribution is the results obtained from the conducted empirical research, according to author's methods. The empirical research conducted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova has a scientific contribution in the field of journalism, participation in Bulgarian television news of major national TV programs, the interaction between journalists and audiences in traditional and online media, good news in Bulgarian television programs. These sociological studies significantly enrich the theoretical analysis, they have great probative value for a number of theoretical hypotheses and assumptions presented in the dissertation. The author uses a number of sociological tools for empirical analysis, which confirm the validity of her theoretical conclusions. The results of sociological research expand and enrich the Bulgarian media theory with new facts which allow to formulate much more accurate and precise scientific conclusions.

III. Notes and recommendations

The dissertation is written very competently, and it shows the very serious professional growth of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova. My main recommendation is that this interesting and useful scientific work be published after some editing. It will be of interest to a wide range of readers-researchers in the field of media studies, experts in media sociology and linguistics, specialists in marketing and digital communication, curious readers. In this way, the results obtained in this very serious scientific study will reach a wide range of enlightened readers, which is the main goal of any scientific study.

IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Popova has numerous studies in this scientific field - she has published several scientific monographs, has a large number of scientific studies and articles, as well as a number of participations in scientific conferences. Her publications and participation in scientific forums fully meet the requirements of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for obtaining scientific degrees and holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approbation and announcement of the results of the research according to art. 5, item 5, and the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, par. 1, item 4 and Art. 69, par. 3.

V. Conclusion

Given the high professional quality of the dissertation, theoretical analysis of social and communication changes in audience behavior, in-depth study of new types of journalism, empirical sociological research that expands and enriches theoretical analysis, **I strongly recommend** to the esteemed members of the scientific jury, to **award the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" to Maria Alexandrova Popova** for her dissertation on **"Audience and journalism: social and communication changes in the behavior of the audience and**

the types of journalism", professional field 3.5. Public communications and information sciences (theory of journalism and media).

Sofia, June 1, 2022

Reviewer: **Prof. Dr. Margarita Pesheva**