



## **REVIEW**

from Prof. Dr. Vesselina Valkanova  
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in scientific field 3.5.  
Social Communications and Information Sciences  
with a dissertation on the topic:  
"Audience and Journalism. Social and Communication Changes in Audience Behavior and  
Types of Journalism",

presented by Maria Alexandrova Popova,  
Department History and Theory of Journalism  
of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

### **1. Presentation of the candidate on the basis of the submitted documentation**

Maria Popova is a full-time associate professor at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication since 2013. Before that, she was a senior and chief assistant. Her main courses are related to journalism theory and art and media. Maria Popova has a doctorate in sociology since 2005 with a dissertation on the topic: "The virtual person. Social-Communicative Peculiarities". Her research interests are in journalism, media, media theory, journalistic theory, arts and media.

### **2. Assessment of the qualities of the dissertation text**

The dissertation work proposed for defense has 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, 4 tables, 47 figures and 19 images are included.

The abstract, attached to the defense documentation, has a volume of 27 pages and follows the content and structure of the dissertation, presenting the main goal, the subject, the object, the hypotheses of the research; summarizes the content of the main structural elements;



presents the summary results of the empirical studies and the main conclusions; ends with self-assessment of contributions. The volume of the abstract is to some extent insufficient to present the too extensive dissertation. Justifications of the approach, structuring and methodology, limitations and stipulations, as well as a list of the author's publications related to the dissertation are missing. In general, the abstract is adequate to the dissertation, essentially summarizing the content of the chapters and parts.

The relevance and significance of the scientific problem posed by Maria Popova are beyond doubt. In the radically changed cultural, but also social and technological context of the world, a new reality of communication and information has emerged. The postmodern situation is a situation of extreme relativism, of radical openness, of doubt, new consciousness, of co-authorship, self-education and self-organization, of eclecticism and fragmentation, of populism and demagoguery, of deliberate undermining of the reputation of traditional media. The tribune is everyone's, everyone is an author, disseminator, commentator and selector of information, and authorities are debunked, the elite give way to the crowd, the media is no longer the only distributor of news and interpretation and master of public opinion. "Nutrition environment" in communications find new formations and centers of controversy, news, non-news and fake news, propaganda and manipulation.

It is a communication situation that gives birth to new ideas, models, attitudes and rethinks traditional ideas, rules, normativity in the media and in the social construct.

The present dissertation is dedicated to a current and important topic related to communication and media, where roles and influences are gradually changing, with an emphasis on audiences that respond dynamically to the changed paradigm of the world.

Turning the researcher's focus to the audience is fully justified - in the dynamically changing socio-cultural, technological, communication context, the audience acquires new characteristics, a profile, it is a participant, not just a recipient of news and interpretations.

Therefore, a comprehensive study on the modern audience and its specifics, caused by the deep transformations in communications and the media, not only fills an understudied scientific field in our country, but also builds on the theory of communication and media studies with such an important side of the theory and pragmatics of journalism for the changed model of media consumption, about the new nature of communication and media narrative, about the creation of media contents and their perception in a digital environment. In this sense, the dissertation definitely adds value to existing research on media policies and practices.

The dissertation outlines specific goals related to the research of the scientific problem, among which the main goal is related to the social and communication behavior of the "active" audience, which is a co-participant in the creation and distribution of contents, influences the evaluation and reputation of the media. In the observations, studies and analysis of the object and subject and in the formulation of the scientific problem, both the complexity of the researched area and the multifacetedness of the existing contradictions, properties and relations of the object were taken into account.



The audience is the central scientific problem of the dissertation, stratified into sub-problems related to: the transformations in the behavior of the recipients, the types of users, the profile of the active audience; citizen participation in the media and civic journalism and studies on the culture of participation in a situation of convergence, with an emphasis on civic journalism in professional media and alternative media as participatory media; extensive research on forms of participation in media content with analysis on participatory journalism, research on the roles of professional and non-professional journalists; dialogicity and visualization in the online media through the prism of multimedia reporting and network journalism - to the problem of emotions in the media, constructive journalism and solution-based journalism. The new convergent media environment, access to different platforms, formats, channels, online communication create a new culture of media consumption, the keywords of which are participation, creativity, access, activity, reactivity.

The new convergent media environment, access to different platforms, formats, channels, online communication create a new culture of media consumption, the keywords of which are participation, creativity, access, activity, reactivity. This variety of sub-problems related to the object, complementing the analysis on the roles, behavior patterns and transformational processes in the audience with in-depth analyzes on the current issues of modern journalism in a digital environment and with the variety of new situations, phenomena and, ultimately, with new types of journalism testify to Maria Popova's broad view of the subject of the dissertation work. It is not an end in itself, because it enriches the analysis and provides starting points for the study of the complex cultural-social and professional phenomenon of citizen journalism, which is realized through dynamic and diverse forms, passes through different channels and works in a complex context. In other words, the study of civic participation in media discourse is essential to bring out the new profile of both the audience and modern journalism, to determine current cultures of participation in a convergent and very dynamic communication environment, hence their central presence in the dissertation is fully justified and necessary.

The dissertation clearly demonstrates the professional reflection of Dr. Maria Popova and her lasting interest in the scientific field to which she devoted herself, broad knowledge of the researched problem. The author has an undisputed mastery of the subject and has carried out serious research on the subject of research, she has penetrated deeply into it, while at the same time taking into account the dynamic social environment, the radical transformations in communications, in audiences, in reception, in platforms and channels of dissemination of information, in communities and society as a whole.

To fulfill the goals and tasks, Maria Popova has chosen an approach that includes theoretical, theoretical-empirical research methods such as the study of scientific sources, observation, comparison, analysis, synthesis, induction, monitoring, verification, etc.

The bibliographic awareness of the author is excellent, overviews of classic, new and most current sources on the subject are offered, thoroughly and carefully researched and presented in good faith. In this sense, the credibility of the theoretical corpus on which this dissertation is based is beyond doubt.



Three separated sociological studies were conducted, on the basis of which the monitoring of civic participation in the media was carried out, using the method of content analysis of the media, media analysis of online users and the communication presence of the media in social networks, observation, analysis and synthesis on a selected news column. This research toolkit is complemented by an in-depth interview with Bulgarian journalists from the monitored media. The chosen research methods are operational in relation to the subject and object of the dissertation work.

The actuality, significance and potential of the topic are effectively exploited through the chosen research approach - at first glance, the linear exposition of theories, views, phenomena, types and forms of journalism are problematized and looked at through the scientific paradigm of communication theory, which sets a stable theoretical corpus of the dissertation. The registration of phenomena and processes is complemented by full-fledged analyzes and connections. The summaries at the end of the chapters contribute to the clear and definite presentation of the analyzes in them, supporting the author's achievements. I believe that author typologies, models and definitions would complement and expand the scientific contributions of the dissertation work to an even greater extent.

To some extent, the information regarding the methodology of the research presented in the fourth chapter is scarce and dispersed - the scope, the studied population, the methods, the purpose, the approach - quantitative, qualitative, the procedure, the organization, the conduct, the processing of the obtained data, the grounds of representativeness are not clear. Some of the methodological issues are clarified when commenting on the research findings, such as the subject matter: "*The study includes a continuum of online news media that most frequently use user-generated content.*" (p. 297). The question arises: how was this "continuum" formed, on what basis were the media studied selected, how were they found to use user-generated content most often? The methodological vagueness of the substantive research and the lack of description of stratification methods in practice should be overcome in a future monograph, so that there are no doubts about its full value for proving certain hypotheses.

The dissertation is in accordance with the compositional requirements for this type of texts. The structuring and orientation are unambiguous, there is coherence of chapters and sub-chapters, the relatively independent parts are logically and meaningfully connected, the connections, sequence, general conclusions and generalizations that emphasize the connectedness of the parts are clearly distinguishable.

The length of the dissertation exceeds the optimum, there are a number of lengthy descriptions that can be reduced to a more compact whole - for example, in places theories and concepts already known to science, fundamental and clear, can be articulated directly, without lengthy description (such as these for online journalism - page 283, etc. sub.). Reducing a number of descriptions would contribute to overcoming the textbook sound of the text in places.

The dissertation is read with interest and ease, there is stylistic homogeneity and marked analyticalness. The style is clear and concise, it does not fall into over-citation, the bibliography is accurate and precise.



### 3. Contributions to the dissertation research

The dissertation is a contribution to the researched field. Key findings are directly derived from practice and relate to practice. The research and theses are original, the candidate has demonstrated levels of critical thinking towards the researched problem. The dissertation has empirical research with a clearly stated applied effect.

Dissertation contributions:

- The dissertation is a complete and first of its kind in our country presentation of the segmentation of the audience according to a criteria system adapted for the subject by the author;
- A broad theoretical overview with a critical analysis of the leading sources on the subject was made;
- The significant transformations in modern journalism and in the audience in the changed social and technological context are brought out;
- The new profile of the media is outlined, stepping on participation, dialogue, the new type of media narrative, influenced and including the narratives of the recipients;
- The research on the emotional side of communication and the analysis on the mediatization of emotions, based on audience observation and the influence of social networks on it, are original;
- The new types of journalism, here called "*variants*", emerging in recent decades have been studied, defined, highlighted, systematized in detail: constructive journalism and solution journalism, network journalism, multimedia journalism, citizen journalism, participatory journalism.

### 4. Notes and recommendations

- In the future work of the author, wider and more systematic comparisons with world practices, approaches and models of behavior, the identification of world phenomena and developments in online communication, including the creation of media content - such a perspective can be included to give perspectives and points of view from Europe and the world, which would be operational for deducing trends and generalizations on the scientific problem.
- When formulating the hypotheses, it should be borne in mind that they don't express prognostic ideas and don't assume processes. A hypothesis is a question related to the scientific problem. In addition to being testable, hypotheses must suggest alternatives. The hypothetical speaking is not: "*media organizations and journalists in general should perceive the audience as co-participant in media*



*production*" (p. 17), but whether this is the case. Regarding the third hypothesis, which states social and communication facts, a consequence of processes - the active position of the recipient leads to the emergence of citizen journalism - these are self-evident processes and consequences that should not be hypothetical in the 21st century. Stylistic problems such as: *"the second hypothesis claims"* etc. can be cleared up here.

- In places there are everyday expressions and phrases that can be replaced by scientific terminology – e.g. on page 18 it talks about the *"known division"* of journalism into qualitative and mass journalism. It is about taxonomies, typologies, classifications, etc. and ultimately for accuracy, clarity and adequacy of the scientific discourse to the scientific field. I recommend avoiding unscientific expressions and phraseology such as *"media players"*, *"swept"*, *"rituals of media consumption"*, etc. etc., including tropes and metaphors.
- Media theories are defined as *"interesting"*, including Jean Baudrillard's view (p. 107), as *"interesting"* types of journalism are qualified - it was done in collaborative journalism, *"interesting"* advantages were seen in civic journalism (p. 145), on 399 pages *"interesting"* researchers also appear. *"Curious"* trends are highlighted on p. 299 etc. – such a statement is atypical of scientific discourse, which is objectified and distanced from personal biases and assessments.
- Awkward phrasing in places, speech issues that could be edited. Expressions that do not sound Bulgarian should be avoided in a future monograph.
- Attention can be paid to the internal structuring – both the dissertation and the abstract have paragraphs longer than a page.
- Dozens of Wikipedia citations and references are available.

## 5. Questions:

- The main goal of the dissertation, as Maria Popova writes on page 15, is *"analysis of the social and communication behavior of the active audience"*, although the topic of the dissertation is more global. And what are the processes of reception and transformations in the inactive or at least more passive audience? In light of the trends of hyper-personalization and the new functions with which the communicator is burdened - management of the digital environment - not only content creation, but also their management and marketing, optimization and monitoring of consumption and effect - to what extent in the withdrawal of an audience from media identification of user churn and inactive subscribers lead to more active audience management actions, for example using the activity of campaigns, events?





- A question regarding the methodology of participatory journalism research - why were only television broadcasters investigated, and not other media - press, online media, radio broadcasters, agencies? Why is the scope narrowed to the central newscasts and the period - to two months? Do you think such a limited scope can prove the research hypotheses? Isn't more extensive research needed to obtain new facts to infer trends and to confirm already known theories? Do you have any observations on the developments on the topic of participatory journalism at this stage - 4 years later?

## **6. Publications and participation in scientific forums**

Maria Popova is the author of 10 books - independent and co-authored, of dozens of articles, studies and research published in scientific periodicals and in scientific collections, with which the requirements of Art. 5, item 5 of the Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and disclosing the results of the research.

The attached report on the implementation of the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and art. 69, para. 3. of the Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the scientific field 3.5 Social Communications and Information Sciences is accurate and according to this criterion, Dr. Maria Popova meets the requirements for obtaining the scientific degree Doctor of Sciences.

## **7. Conclusion**

The dissertation demonstrates broad and deep studies of the scientific discipline, research culture and indisputable knowledge of the research field, which, together with the above contributing points of the research, give me reasons to support the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in science area 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Theory of Journalism and the Media) of Maria Alexandrova Popova for her dissertation on the topic: "Audience and Journalism. Social and Communication Changes in Audience Behavior and Types of Journalism".

Reviewer:

Prof. Dr. Vesselina Valkanova

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