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MODERN JOURNALIST EDUCATION: CURRENT ISSUES

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Abstract

The new standards for the professional journalist work make it necessary to introduce changes into the journalist training. The article is devoted to the current issues of modern journalist education, caused by new challenges in the Information Age, such as moving into the internet space, the evolution of cyberjournalism in general, the growing audio/video component within the journalist field, as well as the demands of consumers and the professional media community. The authors of this article are looking at the data from a survey taken by employers - media specialists, professors and students, a survey that focuses on the contents of education as it relates to the new phenomenon called "a universal journalist". Such kinds of additional learning as an on-the-job training, intra-institutional practice in all media domains, professional journalists' involvement in working with students, shifting teaching priorities towards developing practical skills, are all of utmost importance in the organization of the modern journalist education.

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Keywords: Journalist education, network communication system, competitive skills, cyber-journalism, social networks, multimedia integration.



1. Introduction

Modern journalist education is presently impacted by new standards in the professional journalist work. The topic of journalist education has long, and deservedly so, been the subject of academic discussions and scientific research. Kikhtan, has such wise performed a deep analysis of the most important milestones in the formation of the entire system of Russia's modern journalism education in her fundamental study called "The evolution of journalist education in Russia and abroad" (Kikhtan, 2011). Fateeva, in her turn, was the first one to lay the groundwork for periodization of the journalist education system, which allows for a systematic approach towards further development (Fateeva, 2008). The issues of Russian journalist education in terms of creating professional discourse are being analyzed by Golousova, who concluded that there is a growing need for a universal journalist in modern society and that journalist education must be more practice-oriented (Golousova, 2014).

2. Research Questions

Professional journalists were the first ones to face those challenges, followed by professors who realized that a shift in social development would inevitably result in the realignment of educational priorities. Vladimirova, makes a valid point, stating that the competence of a higher education institution specializing in journalism, consists of

"...enabling a future journalist to adapt to professional environment more quickly and developing competitive skills, which will prepare them for any modern challenges and allow them to acquire new knowledge throughout their whole life" (Vladimirova, 2014).

The fact that journalism is moving into the internet space, the evolution of cyberjournalism in general, the growing audio/video component within the journalist field, the establishment of new lines of specialized training and even new professions should all be equally considered as key challenges. Indeed, one of the most important criteria when it comes to an institution ranking remains whether or not its graduates are sought after by employers. All of that calls for acquiring new knowledge, new abilities and new skills, this is something that both professors and students as well as employers realize. However, in order to draw the exact change vectors one must establish the precise marks, detect the accents and conduct surveys. New media play an important role in creating a system of rules of conduct on the Internet and in establishing a specific culture of electronic communication between representatives of authority and society (Wilson, 2008).

3. Purpose of the Study

In order to successfully modernize the education trajectory one must, first of all, elaborate a list of pertinent questions: ones that pertain to the professional qualities (abilities and skills) of a universal journalist, the personal qualities of a journalist, the media's demand in recruiting new journalists, and also about effective ways to perfect journalist education. The survey questions (Table 01) are being answered by employers/media professionals, professors as well as term 1 through 4 journalism students.

The answers to question 1, which talks about universal journalism – "Which universal journalist qualities (abilities and skills) should be focused on during the course of student education?" - are showing

the following breakdown among employers/media professionals', professors' and students' opinions. Employers/media professionals and students seem to prioritize "basic shooting, picture/video/radio recording and editing skills (81% and 77.0% respectively), while professors deemed "the ability to gather information using social networks (90.5%)" the most important. "The ability to determine specific information needs of their audiences" was the second most important among those qualities according to all three groups. (76.2% - employers, 71.4% - professors, 66.7% - students). The opinions vary, however, when it comes to the third most important quality. The employers believe that "the ability to use working links, create search engine-optimized headlines, utilize and manage main parts and/or categories of a thesaurus in the media text system" is more important (67.6%), the professors tend to think that "the skill of working with online media texts" is preferable (76.2%), while the students feel like "understanding the value system of the target audience and determining the "beacon" figures and reference groups" is key (69.0%).

The employers, professors and students have all placed equal importance on "the ability to gather information using social networks" (61.9% - employers, 69.0% – professors, 57.5 – students). The employers consider the ability to "determine which social communities their audience belongs to", in terms of a universal journalist's competence, less important (52.4%), the professors believe "responding correctly to the situational task questions, that emerge within the network communication system" is of lesser importance (57.1%), while the students deem the ability of "the media companies and the individual internet content providers to understand the importance of the internet community" less significant (49.4%). It is the students who also consider "the ability to use working links, create search engine-optimized headlines, utilize and manage main parts and/or categories of a thesaurus in the media text system" not at all important (23.0%). Ultimately, the responses to that question have shown that there are no completely unimportant qualities when it comes to the notion of a universal journalist, each quality is significant in its own way. At the same time, 18.8% of the respondees have indicated that they are undecided in regards to that question, which emphasizes the work-in-progress nature of that notion. Thus, out of all the options, the employers consider the ability to gather information using social networks a universal journalist's most important quality, which matches the opinion of the professors and the students.

Question number 2: "Name the personal qualities that a journalist should possess, ones that journalist education programs should focus on developing" is an equally important question to ask to be able to draw the vector of journalist education evolution. The employers/media professionals and the professors estimate that the main personal quality should be "accountability" (84.8 and 92.9% respectively), the students on the other hand think it should be "ability to handle stress" (89.7%), while de-prioritizing "accountability" (82.8%). The employers/media professionals place "self-sufficiency" second (79.0%), the professors choose "educability" (83.3%). The employers/media professionals also distinguish "sociability" as an extremely essential quality, the professors do the same for "standard of speech" while students give priority to "performance". The two options that are deemed of lesser importance by the employers/media professionals, the professors and the students are "corporate loyalty" (employers – 53.3%, professors – 61.9%, students – 63.2%) and "leadership" (employers – 56.2%, professors – 73.8%, students – 58.6%). The least important quality according to the employers/media

professionals, the professors and the students is “corporate loyalty” (16.2%, 14.3% 14.9% respectively). 7.4% of the respondees have indicated that they are undecided. Thus, the employers consider accountability to be a journalist’s main personal quality, followed by self-sufficiency. An interesting fact is that according to the European journalists the most qualifying sign, significant for the journalist in the future, is to be the reliable worker and to demonstrate the initiative (Drok, 2011).

The next one, question number 3, is dedicated to determining the highest-demand specialties and new lines of profession: “Which media specialties are modern employers seeking, that aren’t offered at the journalism faculty?” multiple selections are allowed.

The top three positions according to the employers/media professionals are multimedia producer, someone who is responsible for the entire data hierarchy (42.9%), mobile journalist (mojo) who’s able to locate news opportunities outside of the internet (39%) and finally social media editor (25.7%). The professors are giving priority to the press analyst specialty (66.7%), followed by multimedia producer and mobile journalist. The fact that the most sought-after specialty according to the employers/media professionals, which is “multimedia producer, someone who is responsible for the entire data hierarchy”, did not make the top three student choices suggests that professors are giving very little attention to those particular abilities and skills, which affects graduates’ competitiveness when it comes to labor market.

Table 01. Survey results

| № | Specialization | employers/media professionals | professors | students |
|----------|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Editor/aggregator, whose efforts are aimed at collecting (aggregating) information, filtering and publishing content. | 17.1 | 21.4 | 11.5 |
| 2 | Mobile journalist (mojo) who’s able to locate news opportunities outside of the internet | 39.0 | 40.5 | 46.0 |
| 3 | Press analyst | 38.1 | 66.7 | 33.3 |
| 4 | Multimedia producer, someone who is responsible for the entire data hierarchy | 42.9 | 35.7 | 19.5 |
| 5 | Expert editor who navigates the industry specialization | 13.3 | 19.0 | 17.2 |
| 6 | Social media editor | 25.7 | 26.2 | 26.4 |
| 7 | Other specialties (please specify?) | 4.8 | 4.8 | 3.4 |
| 8 | Undecided | 5.7 | 7.1 | 8.0 |

4. Research Methods

A survey taken by employers/media specialists, professors and students focuses on the contents of education as it relates to the new phenomenon called “a universal journalist”. There are both similarities and differences among the opinions of the three respondee categories in terms of the abilities, skills and personal qualities that a universal journalist should possess, new specialization training, as well as the implementation of new efficient policies, aimed at improving the quality of journalist education.

5. Findings

To summarize, the employers suggest that the journalism faculty does not offer such vital media specialties as “multimedia producer” (42.9%), the professors note the absence of “press analyst” (66.7%), while the students believe that they’re not being taught the skills of a mobile journalist (mojo) who’s able to locate breaking news outside of the internet (46%). The views of the three groups are fundamentally different (Figure 01).

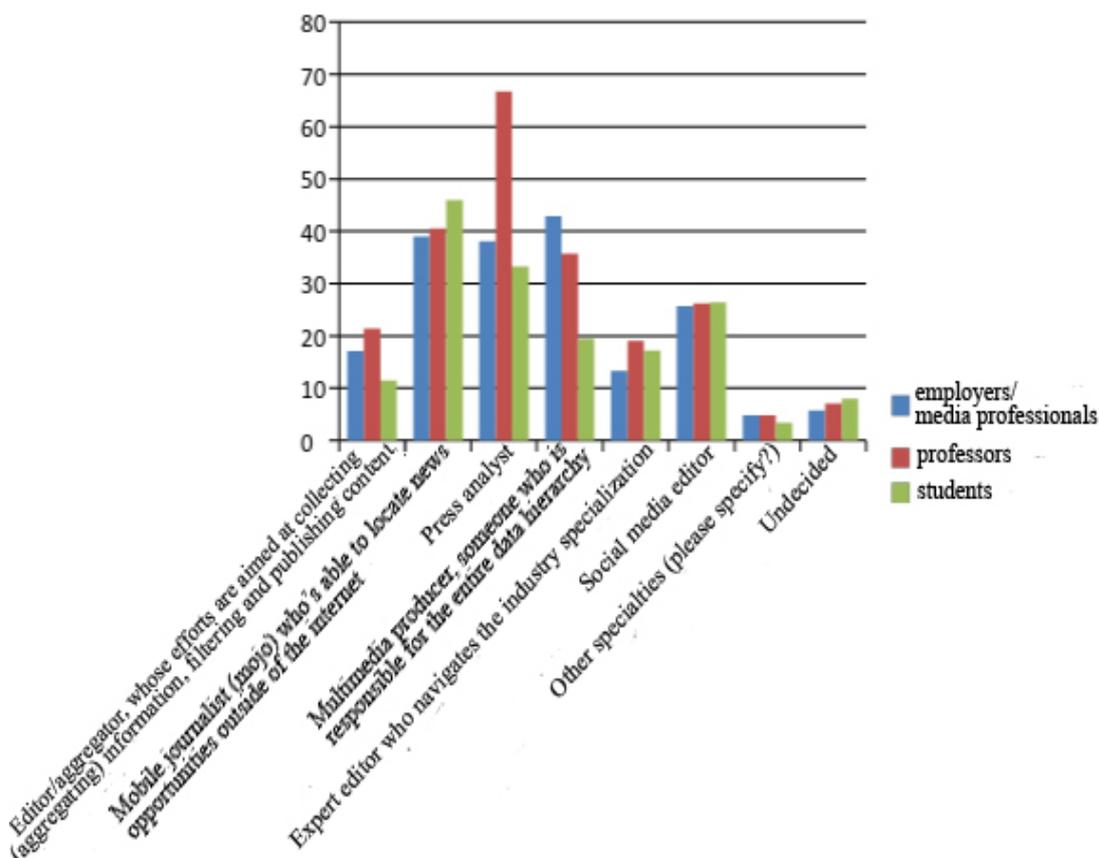


Figure 01. Views of the representatives of the three groups.

It’s worth noting that a very emotional comment was made by the professors of general subjects: “We really need a subject where students could be taught how not to lie”. There are several isolated suggestions coming from the employers to offer such media specialties as “social media marketing specialist”, “picture editor”, “social media marketing manager”, “content manager – a person who manages the content on the website, social network profiles, Instagram and YouTube channel of a

specific organization”, “social media marketing copywriter”, “Search Engine Optimization and Social Media Marketing”. The students have also added editor-in-chief and stringer to the “Other specialties” box.

In answering question number 4, “In your opinion, how effective would be the following measures, which are aimed at improving the quality of journalist education?” the majority of respondees have listed the proposals in the following order: “working more closely with the media organizations, enlisting more of the help from esteemed professional journalists to give lectures and conduct practice lessons” (124.4%), “creating conditions within the facility that offer more opportunity for practical work in all types of media (press, TV, radio, internet media)” (123.1%), “improving the quality of teaching specialized and field-oriented subjects” (120.9%), “increasing the timeframe of on-the-job training” (93.2%), use individualized approach towards students (96.2%).

Based on efficiency score from all respondees, those above are followed by “working more closely with the media organizations, professional journalists’ involvement in the study process and in conducting examinations at the journalism faculty” (79.5%), “a more frequent application of active forms and methods of education in the study process: introduction of training workshops, analyzing realistic situations etc.” (77.4%), “reinforcing the practical direction of the study program” (72.2%), “creating conditions within the facility that offer theoretical education based on the notion of real-life media production, which operates in the context of multimedia integration” (63.2%), “increasing study motivation” (62.0%).

The employers/media professionals indicate that, “increasing the timeframe of on-the-job training” is the most effective measure (152.4%) (respondees had the option to select multiple answers). They also deem “creating conditions within the facility that offer more opportunity for practical work in all types of media (press, TV, radio, internet media)” (80%), “reinforcing the practical direction of the study program” (78.1%), “working more closely with the media organizations, professional journalists’ involvement in the study process and in conducting examinations at the journalism faculty” (76.2%), “improving the quality of teaching specialized and field-oriented subjects, coupling theoretical knowledge with practical work skills” (73.3%), “a more frequent application of active forms and methods of education in the study process: introduction of training workshops, analyzing realistic situations etc.” (71.4%) are also very efficient measures.

“Developing a technology to help create a student’s online creative portfolio” (46.7%), “relying on media’s existing demand in human resources in the context of convergence” (34.3%) and “increasing the timeframe for student’s self-paced activities” (41.9%) are considered less effective by the employers; moreover, the latter has been deemed by 23.8% of the employers as completely inefficient when it comes to improving the quality of journalist education. 61.6% of the respondees however have indicated that they are undecided.

The professors have suggested that such proposals as “improving the quality of teaching specialized and field-oriented subjects, coupling theoretical knowledge with practical work skills” (85.7%), “creating conditions within the facility that offer theoretical education based on the notion of real-life media production, which operates in the context of multimedia integration” (81.0%), “working more closely with the media organizations, professional journalists’ involvement in the study process and

in conducting examinations at the journalism faculty” (78.6%), “a more frequent application of active forms and methods of education in the study process: introduction of training workshops, analyzing realistic situations etc.” (76.2%), “enlisting more of the help from esteemed professional journalists to give lectures and conduct practice lessons” (73.8%), “creating conditions within the facility that offer more opportunity for practical work in all types of media (press, TV, radio, internet media)” (64.3%) are the most efficient, and, unlike the employers, they refer to “relying on media’s existing demand in human resources in the context of convergence” as an effective measure as well (61.9%).

Deborah Wilson David examined the development of university-based community radio stations in the United Kingdom (University of Lincoln: Siren FM), where most of the university-based community radio stations began as student operations, organized and run by student unions; others have been established by academic staff, intending them initially as an industry-level output for students with professional broadcast aspirations. She marks that this kind of facility, situated on a university campus, poses opportunities and challenges for both education and community radio and presents an interesting model for the third tier of broadcasting (Wilson, 2008, 2015).

The professors refer to measures like “increasing the timeframe for students’ self-paced activities” (61.9%) and “enhancing the psychological preparation for working in convergent conditions” (54.8%) as less effective. Finally, most of the professors have classified “Developing a technology to help create a student’s online creative portfolio” as extremely inefficient (14.3%). 52.2% of the professors have indicated that they are undecided.

The following measures are classified by the students as “very effective” (respondees had the option to select multiple answers): “enlisting more of the help from esteemed professional journalists to give lectures and conduct practice lessons” (209,2%), “creating conditions within the facility that offer more opportunity for practical work in all types of media (press, TV, radio, internet media)” (200,0%), “using individualized approach towards students” (194,3%), “a more frequent application of active forms and methods of education in the study process: introduction of training workshops, analyzing realistic situations etc.” (85.1%), “working more closely with the media organizations, professional journalists’ involvement in the study process and in conducting examinations at the journalism faculty” (83.9%).

The students believe that the following proposals are less effective: “increasing on-the-job media training monitoring of the students, introducing interactive hands-on task completion monitoring” (47.1%), “relying on media’s existing demand in human resources in the context of convergence” (44.8%), “increasing the presence of interactive technologies in education” (42.5%), “increasing the presence of multimedia technologies in the process of education” and “holding student contests of journalism craftsmanship” (either response got 36.8%). Finally, the following policies have been deemed as completely inefficient by the students: “increasing on-the-job media training monitoring of the students, the introduction of interactive hands-on task completion monitoring” (52.3%) and “increasing the timeframe for students’ self-paced activities” (21.8%).

Hence, it is evident that there are substantial differences when it comes to the last question. The employers/media professionals are convinced that any practice-oriented solutions, such as on-the-job training, intra-institutional practice in all media domains, professional journalists’ involvement in

working with students, shifting teaching priorities towards developing practical skills, are all of utmost importance.

Niko Drok, professor of Media School of the University of Applied Science Windesheim (Netherlands), underlines that despite the different points of view concerning the future of journalism, after all – both professionals (employers) and students agree on the same competences and professional qualifications which will be urgent next decade of the millennium. As the researches show, they especially focus on the importance of such basic professional qualifications which belong to aspiration to reliability of information, responsibility to the audience, possession of analytical skills and feeling of importance and urgency of information (Drok, 2011).

6. Conclusion

To summarize, the research that was conducted shows the evidence of both similarities and differences among the employers/media professionals' versus higher education professors' versus students' understanding of modernizing the current journalist education process. According to the employers, the young journalists' lack of applicable skills needs to be compensated by expanding the types of hands-on training, which should focus on new multimedia specializations within the journalist profession.

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