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Post mass media in the modern informational society "Journalistic text in a new technological environment: achievements and problems"

JOURNALISTIC TEXT ON THE INTERNET: FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS

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Abstract

The author discusses how electronic texts function in public communication, in particular, in the field of mass information. The use of electronic texts depends on their differential features, such as virtuality, lability, transience, and others, which contribute to both positive and negative aspects of the functioning of electronic texts. In terms of expression, electronic texts are characterized by formal non-compositionality, numerous violations of the language norm and the language system. In terms of content, electronic texts are characterized by a weakening of semantic representativeness. In this regard, the author describes the phenomenon of semantic aberration, namely, the widespread use of false messages. In mass communication, this phenomenon is known as fake news, pseudo-events, pseudo-experts, etc. The author considers mass self-communication to be a positive aspect of the functioning of electronic texts: due to the crisis of official journalism and the phenomenon of media malaise, the impact of citizen media (participatory journalism, street journalism) increases, and official advertising often loses in competition with whisper marketing. A special subject of the author's attention is the interaction between social media and systemic, official journalism. Two schemes of such interaction are considered: 'social media > journalism' and 'journalism > social media'. In connection with the analysis of the material, the author refers to the phenomenon of 'ad hoc democracy'.

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Keywords: Computer-mediated communication, electronic text, mass media, mass self-communication, fake news.



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1. Introduction

Thanks to the emergence and spread of computer technology and, later, the Internet, the notion of electronic texts has been included in scientific practice. Although, by their nature, electronic texts are multifunctional and are presented in different areas of computer-mediated communication, they have a number of common properties, in particular: virtuality, lability and transience (permeability, short period of existence). Computer technologies greatly simplify (from the point of view of the subject) the creation, transfer, editing, preservation, archiving and disposal of electronic texts. It is in relation to this that Grzenia (2006) writes about the increasing in-dependence of subjects from the material (p. 75). This is reflected in modern journalism, which actively uses Internet resources. In this article, the author considers the positive and negative aspects of the relationship between the journalism and the Internet.

2. Problem Statement

The Internet provides services that are used a wide variety of different areas activities: manufacturers, financiers, businessmen, politicians, press secretaries, advertisers, managers, politicians, journalists, individuals, etc. Regardless of the nature of the activities and goals, the Internet is a tool that significantly increases mobility of actions, which is especially important with a wide coverage of counterparties and recipients. This is well illustrated by the example of digital photography as an essential component of information services on the Internet, as well as traditional print journalism. Researchers have also noted the role of digital photography in creating and strengthening social contacts, especially in the peer groups (van Dijck, 2012, p. 507).

The problem, however, is that technical determinism manifests not only in the realization and the instrumental nature of actions, but through the changes and effect that technical means bring about. For instance, technical means can create new values. Likewise, they can influence the communication environment and the social relations of its participants as well as the conditions and directions of message interpretation (Płonkowski, 2006, p. 56). In this regard it should be noted, first of all, that the most important achievement of Web 2.0 technology was the inclusion of the audience in the mass communication process. Examples of this include the feedback phenomenon through such discourses as Internet commentary, forums (discussion group), blogs, fan pages (in social media), networks, email, communicator, etc. (Wiktor, 2013, p. 275). Thanks to the Internet, the sphere of “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2010, p. 9) has formed, which combines elements of mass, public communication and elements of interpersonal, informal communication (one of the conditions of which is the equality of social status of subjects, the possibility of free exchange of replicas, free choice of content, etc.). The discourses mentioned above serve not only private, but also professional, official spheres of communication (Grzenia, 2006, p. 97; Kuhlen, 1998, p. 38; Rittenberger & Zimmermann, 2001, p. 258).

This sphere of mass communication is considered as the fourth sector, built on three sectors of the cybernetic culture: 1) the sphere of interpersonal private communication; 2) the sphere of official, public communication; 3) the sphere of media communication (Filiciak, Hofmokl, & Tarkowski, 2012). Computer-mediated discourses, including social network, discussion groups, and others, have been the subject of many scientific publications (Booth, 2016; Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2017; Stassen, 2010; Masip, Guallar, & Suau, 2015).

On the one hand, the “mass self-communication” sector represents an alternative for traditional, “systemic” media. The current crisis of official journalism and the phenomenon of media malaise (Ejaz, 2017; Curran, Coen, & Soroka, 2014; Loveless, 2015) can be seen to have connections with the increasing impact of citizen journalism (citizen media, participatory journalism, street journalism), while official advertising often loses in competition with the so-called whisper marketing / buzz marketing (Gawrońska, 2013; Kimmel, 2014). Studies show that the role of the fourth sector of mass communication is constantly growing. According to the Polish news agency Newseria, 51% of respondents (globally) indicate that they receive information from social networks, while in Poland this figure reaches 58% (Fake News, 2017). The fact that, according to available data social media do not cause the majority of Internet users to trust promises of security and the protection of personal data and information, slightly affects their popularity (<https://issa.org.pl/bezpieczenstwo-firmy/dokad-zmierzamy-nieustanna-debata-pomiedzy-prywatnoscia-a-bezpieczenstwem>).

On the other hand, a certain integration of “mass self-communication” and journalism is also noticeable, although this process has a bi-directional, ambivalent nature. Firstly, journalists are increasingly turning to the Internet (information services, www pages, social media, etc.) as a source of information (as an alternative to the traditional journalistic writing). Secondly, social media is becoming a medium of distribution and popularization of journalistic information. According to the PressInstitute project (<https://pressinstitute.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/raport-social-media.pdf>), more than 80% of Polish journalists turn to social media for professional purposes, 70% of them consider that social networks can provide information that can be transferred to the media. The advantages of social networks include the possibility of establishing direct contact with the source of information. They also allow users to distribute journalistic materials (in most cases through the links to publications), and to analyze public opinion.

3. Research Questions

Virtuality, lability and transience of electronic texts are factors which contribute to the dissemination of some negative phenomena in mass communication such as journalism, marketing communication, image communication, etc. Preliminary observations show that these phenomena relate to the form and to the content of texts. There is significant interest in the problem of control over the formal correctness (in particular, language) of the text. The author’s independence from the material, which was discussed in the introduction, contributes to the weakening of control over its form, particularly the increasing ignorance of the requirements of formal correctness of messages. Another problem concerns the content of texts, which requires an examination of the extent to which the above-mentioned properties of electronic texts contribute to their dysfunctionality, primarily, to their semantic non-representativeness. The concept of “post-truth”, which has become popular lately, partly stems from the ideology of postmodernism, but in part it is a by-product of computer-mediated communication.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to study the influence that modern computer and Internet technologies have on dynamic processes in the field of mass communication, primarily in the field of journalism. Although the inter-action of journalism and “mass self-communication”, as previously indicated, is

ambivalent, the author will focus primarily on one side of this phenomenon, namely, how computer-mediated communication affects traditional media. As an object of research, materials expropriated from the Internet will be used: articles published mainly on Russian Internet portals, as well as the information provided in special reports.

5. Research Methods

The main method is observation. This method is used for the extraction, analysis and interpretation of information services on the Internet and the “system” media. In addition, the author takes into account the method of critical analysis of computer-mediated discourse, especially in relation to the discourses in which the phenomenon of semantic aberration is observed. The semantic verification of texts will perform an auxiliary function.

6. Findings

6.1. Aspects of expression

One of the negative consequences of computerization is a marked increase of the linguistic infantilism of the authors of electronic texts, i.e. neglect the formal side of the message. The realization of the fact that the text is easily reformatted, and also checked and corrected (from a formal point of view) in an automatic mode, contributes to the deconcentration of the attention of the writers. In the texts of mass communication, not only on the Internet but also in quality journalism, there are a large number of language errors. In this regard, the academic literature shows that a characteristic feature of the syntax of the language of the global network is the tendency towards agrammatism (Ivanov, 2010). In particular, agrammatism appears in the context of intercultural communication. It is possible to observe situations in which advertising and promotional texts function in a translated version, but the translation (as evidenced by its quality) is performed by an online translator. The lack of necessary text editing leads to a large number of errors. An example is the Polish version of the website of the Swedish University in Lund (<https://www.masterstudies.pl/universytety/Szwecja/Lund-Uni>), the grammatical and lexical errors are in italics:

- (1) Uniwersytet w Lund — *Szwecji Najlepiej Miejsce Uniwersytet* [tytuł]. *Założona w 1666 r., Uniwersytet w Lund w Szwecji, jest stale w rankingu 100 najlepszych na świecie uniwersytetów (73. miejsce na świecie i szwedzki ranking uniwersytetu w Szwecji, ranking QS 2016/17). Uniwersytet ma 42 000 studentów i ponad 7 500 pracowników i oferuje 100 studiów magisterskich oraz 6 studiów licencjackich prowadzonych w języku angielskim. Lund jest najbardziej atrakcyjnym miejscem badania w Szwecji. Uniwersytet oferuje jeden z najszerszych zakresów programów i kursów w Skandynawii, w oparciu o badania interdyscyplinarne i najnowocześniejszych. Stopień z Uniwersytetu w Lund jest cechą jakości zarówno w Szwecji jak i za granicą. Nasze osiem wydziałów i wiele wyspecjalizowane ośrodki badawcze oferują kształcenie w następujących obszarach tematycznych:*

Projekt architektury

Media komunikacyjne

Sztuk i Sztuk

Nauki humanistyczne, języki i teologia

Medycyna i zdrowie

Nauka

In the theory of language acquisition, there is the concept of frozen competence (Bleach, 1990, p. 65), which characterizes the language behavior of foreigners in the authentic cultural L2 environment. A foreigner attains such a level of efficiency in L2 that it can be sufficiently used in a foreign language environment, although the level of mastery is not complete. At some point, both the person himself and his entourage become addicted to his method of verbal behavior, i.e. to its incomplete language competence. It turns out to be justified from a pragmatic point of view, which deprives a person of incentives to strive for the development of his language skills – he “freezes” them, as it were. We see a similar situation in the field of the use of computer technology. The Internet users master only the most necessary programs and operations and almost never use all the capabilities of computer technology. As the editor-in-chief of a scientific journal (“Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski”, ISSN 2081-1128), this author constantly finds that many authors submitting articles for publication have no knowledge of such things as automatic word wrap, dialog windows in a text editor program etc. Most of them use the Space key to defuse or red line and use the Enter key to indent between paragraphs.

It can be stated that certain types (or attitudes) of language behavior began to dominate Internet communications: language liberalism, indifference and naturalism. At the same time, the opposite phenomenon has also spread – language creationism, but in a special form: its essence consists in a nihilistic attitude to the codification of speech behavior. In modern Russian culture, thanks to the Internet at the beginning of the XXI century, a phenomenon qualified as the “Albany language” has spread. We are dealing with a special written jargon, consisting in deliberately wrong spelling of words, and in addition – in the frequent use of the swear words. This jargon has spread in the journalism (for example, in the language stamps of Live Journal), as well as in the fiction, for example in Dmitriy Sokolovskiy’s “The Bible of bastards, or Uchebneg Albanian language”.

6.2. Aspects of content

With regard to the content of the text, those semantic aberrations which are becoming increasingly visible are connected with extensional and intensional aspects of the content of lexical units, statements and texts. The extensional aspect of the meaning of nominative (lexical) units is manifested, in particular, in the phenomenon of supposition. As for journalistic, informational texts, suppositories are existential in nature: what is reported (especially in the position of the grammatical subject) must actually exist. If we, for example, read on the website of the portal Lenta.ru:

(2) The singer Luna spoke about the difficulties of her life with the creator of the group “Mushrooms”.

we obviously assume that the singer Luna exists — she is not an invention of the author of the news. This requirement of media communication is violated in situations with the presence of pseudo-participants and pseudo-experts. In the scientific literature, they are qualified as extensional phantoms (Kiklewicz, 2017, p. 77). An example is the phenomenon of Professor Lorenz Haag. Starting from 2009, the analytical materials and comments by this German expert appear in the Russian media. Prof. Haag is allegedly a employee of

the Institute for Economic Innovations (Institut für Wirtschaftsnähe Innovation) in Chemnitz (in Saxony, near Leipzig). For comparison, I will cite one of such information posted on the ITAR TASS website:

- (3) Western leaders “must abandon anti-Russian rhetoric, lift sanctions imposed on Russia and closely analyze and understand motives behind Russia’s actions,” in the Ukrainian crisis, the head of the German Global Communications Agency said on Monday. “Ukraine must be a neutral buffer state not making part of NATO or the European Union,” Lorenz Haag told ITAR-TASS (<http://itar-tass.com/en/world/743477>).

Prof. Haag, as you can read on the Internet (<https://russian.rt.com/inotv/2014-10-17/Lorenc-Hag-priznannij-ekspert-ili>), invariably speaks in favor of the policies of the Russian authorities, in particular, to Ukraine, but he is not limited to politics: he talks about the tours of the ensemble “Cossacks of Russia”, about the place of Rasul Gamzatov in world literature and about the world-historical significance of the flight of Yuri Gagarin. An investigation by German journalists (Banse, Ginsburg, & Müller, 2014), however, revealed that Prof. Haag’s name was not found in any bibliographic catalog. The fiction is not only his title of professor, but also the institute in Chemnitz, which, in reality, does not exist.

The phenomenon of pseudo-participants is realized in several forms. Firstly, it is necessary to pay attention to the phenomenon of trolling, i.e. imitation of participation in Internet discussion groups, behind which lies the purposeful dissemination of untruthful, provocative messages directing the discussion in a certain direction. On Radio Svoboda, you can read that a significant part of posts and comments on political Internet forums are left by professional trolls who receive a salary for participating in discussions (Volchek, 2015). A Polish site (https://www.bankier.pl/forum/temat_hm-tak-spojrzalem-znowu-w-to-forum-i-co-widze.27011427.html) contains information about troll interference in the online professional and semi-professional forums related to the marketing activities of firms.

Secondly, pseudo-participants in Internet communications may be found in the form of bots – special computer programs designed to perform actions according to a given algorithm and through interfaces designed for people. Bots mimic the actions of the people, and it is so plausible that they cannot be distinguished from real users. For example, journalists reported (<http://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/7,130517,23921014,boty-w-sluzbie-dudy-jak-manipulowano-internetem-w-kampanii.html>) that in 2015, during the election campaign for the presidency of Poland, Andrzej Duda’s staff engaged a special company which generated posts in the social media and Internet discussion groups (and, in particular, had to discredit an alternative candidate, Bronisław Komorowski). For each post, an amount of 2 PLN was charged. According to available data (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016), in 2016, before the presidential elections in the USA, 18% of all posts in social network were generated by accounts of this nature. Their number in the Twitter environment (in the global dimension) is estimated from 9% to 15%, i. e. 29-40 million accounts (Varol, Ferrara, Davis, Menczer, & Flammini, 2017).

The Internet environment promotes the spread of the fake news, i.e. knowingly false information. Pseudo-facts and pseudo-events have long been known in journalistic practice (Jabłoński 2007, p. 75ff.), but, due to modern electronic resources, this phenomenon has become more widespread. One of the reasons for this is the possibility of mobile speculation with an electronic text: it can appear on the website of a news portal and after a short time (for example, in a few hours) disappear without a trace (which is hard to imagine in printed journalism). Thus, we are dealing with a dissipative and, in a certain sense, paradoxical

situation: the text seems to exist and the text doesn't exist. This is reminiscent of Maxim Gorky's "Life of Klim Samgin": "But a boy was there? Maybe there was no boy at all?". This technique provides the author with inviolability: there is no material evidence for accusations of lying or, for example, slander. A fine example, can be seen in the Russian Internet portal Rambler.ru, which began on November 20, 2014 with an eloquent headline: "The UN accused Kiev of splitting Ukraine" (Is this a direct quote? "The UN accuses Kiev of splitting Ukraine"). The main page contains only this title and a brief announcement. To read the entire text, we have to go to the next page (<http://news.rambler.ru/27985401/>). Here, the content of the text is presented somewhat differently: we are talking about the charges that Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General of the UN in the field of human rights, allegedly addressed to the Ukrainian authorities. In fact, neither the UN website nor the google.pl search engine could find confirmation of this information. Significantly, this information only appeared for a short time on the site Rambler.ru, presumably due to fears that the falsification could cause an international scandal.

The fragmentation of text as a rhetorical approach (see: Kiklewicz, 2017, 2018) serves to falsify the Internet information services. The journalistic text (the original text of the author working for this portal, or the text borrowed from a website of the information agency) is presented in the form of separate segments: first, on the main page in the form of a short lead, usually accompanied by photo-illustration; secondly, in a new window, to which you can follow the link in the form of a more detailed presentation (the authorship of which belongs to the portal); thirdly, in the form of a full, original text (indicating the source).

The content presented in the main window (in the form of lead) is prepared. Usually, information about the source of the message is eliminated, which allows a personal opinion to be presented as an objective state of affairs. Another type of this kind of manipulation is the representation of possible events as real ones. For example, on January 31, 2019, the article "(A) Temporary measure(s) of isolation. Poland is digging a channel bypassing Kaliningrad" was published on the website of Radio Svoboda (<https://www.svoboda.org/a/29741813.html>). The verb is digging in the title, used in the continuous form, leads readers to understand that the situation is actually taking place. The content of the text, however, indicates that the journalist is only referring to the project — there is no reason to say that it will be implemented.

Of particular note is the role of the fourth sector of social communication, namely social network, which already has been mentioned at the beginning of the article. The interaction of social media with the journalistic sector has a bi-directional character: on the one hand, journalists, as already noted, actively use social media as an information resource; on the other hand, social media are becoming the medium for the dissemination and popularization of journalistic information. In both cases, we have to state a significant increase in aberration(al) discourses.

As for the phenomena of the first type, they are represented by several varieties. For example, there are those situations when journalists use unreliable sources from the Internet that purposefully generate fake news. For example, in January 2017, Donbass News International (DNI), operating in occupied Donetsk, published on the Internet information that the United States had sent 3,600 tanks to Europe to "prepare NATO for war with Russia." A network of sites devoted to conspiracy theories spread the news about the strengthening of the US military contingent in Europe. It eventually reached the Russian media. Later it turned out that the information contained a factual error: accidentally or deliberately the total number of

vehicles (including trailers and HMMWV) was confused with the number of tanks alone. As a result, the US tank fleet was overestimated by 20 times.

The website of the news agency Agencja Informacyjna Newseria (Fake News, 2017) reports how in 2015 the famous Polish journalist Tomasz Lis made a public apology regarding the use of the fake information, the source of which was a post on the Internet. In his program on the television station TVP2, Lis referred to a post by Kinga Duda, the daughter of the (then) presidential candidate Andrzej Duda. According to Lis, the politician's daughter wrote about the Oscar winning Polish-Danish film "Ida" (dir. Paweł Pawlikowski), saying that if her father became president, he would return the prize to the Americans. After the release of the program, it turned out that the post mentioned by Lis was fake.

A similar scenario can be noted in the sensational "Liza case" from 2016. Information about the rape of a 13-year-old Russian German by Arab migrants, as well as accusations against the German government and the media-silence about the situation, first appeared on the Internet via a social network. This case immediately received a wide response in the Russian public media. German media reported on the incident after the release of the report on the Russian TV (Channel One). A police investigation, however, later established there was no reported evidence of the abduction and rape of Lisa.

"The Liza case" is also interesting in that it became the subject of a diplomatic scandal involving the foreign ministers of Russia and Germany. At a press conference on January 26 in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the German authorities of concealing the truth about what had happened for political reasons. This case (namely, the engagement of state institutions) to some extent corresponds to the phenomenon defined as 'Ad Hoc Democracy' (Szewczak, 2010, p. 14.). The peculiarity of the "Liza case" is that the first element in the chain of events turned out to be messages in a social network. The sequence of the events can be represented as a diagram (see fig. 01).

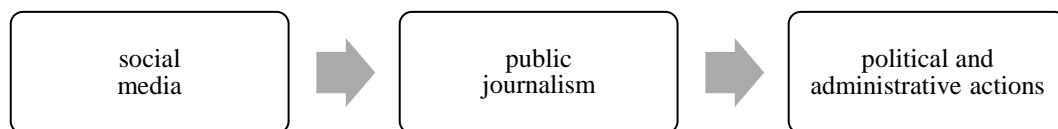


Figure 01. The interaction of journalism and social media in the model of Ad Hoc Democracy

Social networks have become such an important source of information for official media that they are sometimes used to verify journalistic messages: if the official information is not confirmed on the social network, this suggests that it was fictitious. For example, on July 12, 2014, Channel One Russia showed an interview with a certain Galina Pyshnyak (a "refugee from Slavyansk"), who told how the soldiers of the National Guard of Ukraine (called punitive and fascists) crucified a three-year-old child on a notice board in the presence of its mother. Later, the lie was revealed: journalist Yevgeny Feldman interviewed several dozen residents of Slavyansk, who failed to confirm the information of the Russian Channel One (<http://rus.news-ru.ua/world/14jul2014/pervikanalsovral.html>). A video was later posted on the website of "Novaya Gazeta" of Feldman's communication with the townspeople. No acknowledgement of the alleged incident was obtained. Moreover, the search for documentary evidence of the public execution on the Internet proved fruitless, although numerous photo and video testimonies of the presence of Ukrainian security officials in Slavyansk are available online (see: Kiklewicz, 2015, p. 191).

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, reference is made to the article “Technical progress as a cultural problem” by Lotman (1988), in which the semiotician from Tartu wrote that technical progress does not necessarily contribute to social progress; indeed, it often causes stagnation and destabilization, mass situations of stress and reanimation of deeply archaic models of consciousness. In the same vein, the Polish researcher Juza (2016, p. 206) writes that the hopes associated with the development of the Internet and the Web 2.0 network were generally not justified: instead of the expected growth in the free exchange of valuable, cognitive information the Internet (in particular, the social network) has become an area of mass speculation, as well as the glorification of intellectual infantilism. Internet services (as communicative intermediaries) are at the disposal of private firms that are interested in making a profit — at their own expense or at the expense of customers. This, as Juza writes, becomes the cause of all sorts of abuses. The pragmatic (in other words, praxeological) criterion of communicative activity turns out to be the main one, overshadowing the requirement of semantic (especially verifiable) representativeness of texts. The principle of quality journalism: to provide truthful information to the audience, on the basis of which people could form their own picture of events taking place in reality and make decisions, is unprofitable for commercial and political organizations that seek to manipulate public opinion.

A critical analysis of the functioning of journalism in the electronic environment convinces us that technical determinism has its limitations: its impact on social processes is significant, but the contextual-social component of the media infrastructure, or the human factor, plays a decisive role. Unfortunately, in many situations this factor is regressive. This is especially noticeable against the background of unfulfilled hopes and expectations, which people connected with communication on the Internet a dozen years ago.

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