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

**THE CONSTANT SUBSTANCE OF JOURNALISM IN CHANGING
ENVIRONMENTS**

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Abstract

The article deals with theoretical and methodological approaches to studying journalism, its current state and prospects of development. The problem situation is that researchers mainly use one of the possible methodological approaches, namely, relational one. In such case, journalism is considered through its relations with external environments and partners. Accordingly, the changes in the external environments do modify journalism. Nowadays, this collision is especially evident in relations with the technical and technological environment of journalism functioning, where fundamental changes have emerged. The expansion of information and communication technologies has raised concerns on the crisis of journalism and even its death. The present and future of journalism are seen quite differently if using a substantial methodology that focuses on the essence of the phenomenon, not its functional relations. Journalism is relatively autonomous from its environments, including technological basis, and it retains its own essence as an institution and profession, although it acquires new forms and embodiment ways. According to a few of prominent theorists, it gains brilliant prospects for development; despite it will exist not only in other forms, but also on other material carriers. In this context, the author touches upon discussions on the updating of qualification requirements for media professionals as well as the content of the journalists University education. The author makes his conclusions on the basis of the grouping data on the relationship of journalism with its environments of functioning and critical evaluation of current research representations on the topic.

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1. Introduction

For journalism researchers and practitioners, statements on the profession crisis and soon disappearance from public life became just habitual thing. “The end of journalism - version 2.0” (Charles, 2014) – this is the title of a vast work by the British authors (however, the chapters content leads to the opposite conclusion). “Journalism in crisis: Time for a government bailout” (2009) – this is the similar title of the analytical review made by American sociologists. Experts consider the development of information and communication technologies to be the most powerful factor in the destruction of social institution and profession: “The emergence of the Web has to a degree de-institutionalised journalism ... A journalist ... can in theory be anyone” (Russial, Laufer, & Wasko, 2015, p. 301). According to such statements, journalism is allegedly incompatible with the digital revolution.

Of course, the dependence of the journalism forms and other manifestations on the technological environment is beyond doubt. However, in the debating the future of journalism not only tragic predictions may be found, but also perspectives of its development. In particular, Deuze and Witschge (2018) have offered the paradoxical “Beyond journalism” theoretical approach. As journalism functions in increasingly networked settings, it “requires a toolkit that looks at the field as a moving object and as a dynamic set of practices and expectations – a profession in a permanent process of becoming. ‘Beyond journalism’ is an approach to journalism that considers it as a dynamic object of study” (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 177). At the same time, there are also very optimistic forecasts concerning the wonderful future of journalism:

This dynamic landscape of continuous and diversified witnessing and reporting does not represent a crisis of journalism, but rather, an explosion of it. In fact, the profession seems to be more alive than ever and going through a multiplication of both forms and content at amazing speed. ... The ‘crisis’ in journalism seems to be mainly one of traditional business models for print and broadcast journalism. (Haak van der, Parks, & Castells, 2012, pp. 2923-2924)

Hence, favorable prospects are opening up for the research community, which “should care about journalism studies because it helps us understand this key social institution ... Journalism studies is one of the fastest growing areas within the larger discipline of communication research and media studies” (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009a, p. 11). One can refer to other examples differences of all sorts relating to interpreting the journalism current state and future in changing technological circumstances. Apparently, there are strong rational grounds under the difference of conclusions, which should be to precisely identify and explained.

2. Problem Statement

From theoretical viewpoint, the problem is not the collision of individual judgments, but the difference of methodological approaches to the object under study. Proponents of the primacy of technology use a relational methodology that describes the object as (through) social relations or interactions; those who insist on the maintaining and flourishing journalism, in fact, gravitate to the

attributive-substantive methodology, which treats the object through its substantive properties (the object as it is), that is, through the essence. Such a division is actively used in scientific methodology while studying considerable social phenomena, phenomena, e.g., political power (Koneva & Okulich, 2016). In the context of social sciences, the strong conviction exists that "the idea of using the substance in the social sphere is very tempting. This category allows us to focus on various aspects of variability and increase our predictive abilities" (Vasiliev, 2007, p. 22). We believe, journalism should not stay an exception, and in the light of the substantive approach, many of its sensitive issues can be positively resolved, including the digital revolution effects.

3. Research Questions

The research questions directly follow from the preamble proposed above. First, there's needed to see the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to understanding modern and future journalism; more specifically, the need to reveal the likely benefits of substantive methodology.

Second, there's needed to find ways for applying the substantive approach to the analysis of the journalism relationship with the technological environment within which it functions. In this regard, it is necessary to divide from each other the changes that affect, on the one hand, the essence of journalism as a social institution and professional activity, and, on the other hand, its forms of functioning and labor tools. Objective studying current media practices would give needed materials for realistic conclusions. For example, let's listen to experts in TV journalism, which depends on the technical environment especially strongly. They argue that any change in technical parameters affects the screen image aesthetics, however, the essential features of television broadcasting do not change (Berezhnaia, 2018).

Third, special attention should be given to the qualification of the personnel in media organizations. Obviously, a sharp upgrade of the technical base entail's new qualification requirements and the corresponding dynamics of the labor market. It may be assumed that there is a contradiction between the public demand for journalists with their classical abilities and the interests of employers who are concerned on their business state. This contradiction has already been noted in empirical studies. In particular, the monitoring of vacancies in Australian media showed that two-thirds of the vacant newsroom jobs were not described as journalism but required online or digital skills. "Digital skills were perceived by employers at this transformative time for news media as useful, but not yet central to the role of the journalist. A 'journalist' was still viewed in traditional 'age of the reporter' terms" (Young & Carson, 2018, p. 15). Thus, the content of media channels produced by journalists collides with the technical supporting, for which employees with digital skills are responsible. Conflicts of this kind also deserve special consideration.

4. Purpose of the Study

The article is primarily aimed at considering promising theoretical approaches to analyzing the journalism current state and future, namely at revealing the productivity of the substantive approach.

5. Research Methods

As research methods, we use: a critical review of theoretical approaches to assessing current state and prospects of journalism, paying special attention to the differences between relational and substantive methodologies; grouping of data on the relationship of journalism with its digital environment of functioning; and the synthesis of research representations on the topic, in parallel with the critical evaluation of unrealistic and not well-founded concepts.

6. Findings

It seems that in reasoning on journalism, researchers choose mainly relational methodology, that is, they correlate their own estimations and projections with the relations, which journalism does establish with various external environments and actors. In such analytic frame, the social interconnections of the press have got a priority position. Here is a typical example of such reasoning: "The work of journalism in its normative paradigm, as a social service has a purely practical nature, which is associated with the providing our society with a large number of vital benefits" (Ivanitskiy, 2015, p. 30). No dispute, the interpretation of the journalism mission in the light of public service has been fixed in internationally recognized deontological codes and fundamental theoretical works. Accordingly, the author's argumentation in favor of reviving high civic duty journalism in Russia deserves approval and support. However, it should be noted that the question *for what?* is in focus, then the questions *what?* and *what is it like?* should be initial ones.

Similar logical contradictions arise when getting acquainted with the following statement: "The journalism functioning is a basic process of its social functions realization, which takes place in the form of purposeful interaction with the environment"; and the following addition is particularly meaningful: "For journalism, two social subjects ... have especial importance, namely the *state power* ... and the *audience*, or rather the total potential audience" (Lazutina, 2018, p. 15). The quoted statement presents a relational way of understanding journalism, but also it offers a sociological version, outside which lays the understanding of journalism as a phenomenon itself, regardless to interaction with external social actors. Another position looks correct: "Journalism seems to be just a diligent likeness of the society, by which it was created ... But the functioning of journalism often shows quite serious differences from the functioning of society as a whole" (Sidorov, 2015, p. 49).

We are not eager arguing with the authors cited above on their views, but we suggest giving the necessary diversity to the methodological basis of the analysis. This suggestion could be a response to the appeal, which persistently arises in nowadays works: "The theory of journalism is faced with the task of a deeper studying ... the problems of the journalism *integrity* and of the definitive integrative result of its functioning as a system object, at the achievement of which the functioning of all its parts is aimed" (Demina & Shkondin, 2016, p. 564).

In our opinion, it would be useful to listen to those philosophers who remind that, firstly, "the substance of the phenomenon is something without which this phenomenon cannot exist" and, secondly, that "without the substance of the phenomenon it is impossible to determine the existence of the phenomenon, to distinguish it among other phenomena, and therefore to begin researching" (Afanasiev,

2010, para. 7, 10). At the first stage, one should take into account the substantive characteristics (essence) of journalism as the potentiality to act and interact with external environments, and only then analyze the functioning, which is derived from the potential and serves its implementation. In particular, in this case, there will appear a reliable explanatory basis under the fundamental thesis, with which we fully agree:

The market commercial environment ... not only is contraindicated for journalism, but it is simply deadly for it ... The market is not its space of being, but the territory of PR, GR, advertorial, marketing and other technologies that ultimately use mass communication channels solely in the interests of capital. (Ivanitskiy, 2015, p. 29)

Otherwise, the inevitable will be various kinds of conjunctural depending on the interests and influences of third-party actors, including the government, political elite, business, undeveloped audience with its unstable requests, etc. We are not talking on the danger of interacting with institutional and private partners; the partnership is predetermined by the conditions and character of journalism functioning. We are talking on that journalism should maintain its qualitative certainty and that namely essentially (naturally) inherent properties of journalism should be extracted and used by partners in business interaction.

A special kind of dependence on the external environment in the organizational and technological field does exist. Both in the traditional newsroom practice and in the reflecting academic consciousness, the inertia to percept journalism as the content substance of mass media was deeply rooted. The growing migration of journalists and their working to new industries, primarily to online resources adds to concerns on the "disappearance" of the profession. The object of the theory has obviously modified, and the changes have created a need to rethink what journalism is and consequently to reassess theories of journalism. Some authors make such a conclusion after analyzing research publications devoted to the digitalization of the media industry. According to their observations, there is a transition from discussing the symptoms of the crisis in journalism to fundamental questions on its essence. As they write:

Philosophical perspectives on digital journalism remain few. We believe that this is a blind spot not only of this special issue but of journalism studies at large. If we are to address the fundamental questions concerning the essential character of journalism, journalism studies should lean more heavily on perspectives such as ethics, ontology and epistemology. They liberate scholars from studying journalism only within the institutional framework. (Steensen & Ahva, 2015, p. 15)

In fact, the substantive approach serves these purposes. It would be strange and unrealistic try to deny a technological breakthrough in the industry, as well as the fruitfulness of the movement in theory. However, are there any reasons to state that journalism has changed in its essence? That is the fundamental question.

In our view, an example of a balanced mix of realism, innovation, and conceptuality is contained in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 of the CE Committee of Ministers to member states on a new nation of media. In the document, the variability of formal manifestations and the preservation of the core essential characteristics of media and journalism are clearly separated from each other. On one side, a new, broad notion of media encompasses all actors involved in the production and dissemination of content which are designed to facilitate interactive mass communication. On the other side, they propose a set of criteria for classifying resources as media (let us say – genuine media), which, in fact, distinguish journalism from non-journalism: intent to act as media, editorial control, professional standards, public expectations from media, and media responsibilities. There is no doubt that this result of intellectual work in the international community should find a place in the theoretical discourse on the interrelations between essence and variability in newest journalism. Of course, this primarily refers to the impact of technical modernization on the content, professional values and methods of work in the industry.

Against this background, the following idea proves quite well-grounded: “It would be a mistake to assume that the types of journalism emerging outside and alongside legacy news organizations are necessarily different or oppositional to the core values, ideals, and practices of the profession” (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 168). It seems to us that this conclusion speaks in favor of the substantive methodology as a tool for assessing the latest journalism and prospects of its developing in a dynamic technological environment.

The substantive approach does not just admit, but implies changes at the level of the phenomenon, in its forms, properties, and states. That is what undoubtedly happening with the latest journalism, including journalism, which has left the limits of traditional media, such as newspapers, radio and television companies, etc. However, there remains a certain semantic core, without which journalism would no longer be itself. Paradoxically, we find an ally in Bourdieu (1998). He was not a supporter of the scientific ideology of substantivalism, but he stressed:

Journalism is a microcosm with its own laws, defined both by its position in the world at large and by the attractions and repulsions to which it is subject from other such microcosms. To say that it is independent or autonomous, that it has its own laws, is to say that what happens in it cannot be understood by looking only at external factors. That is why I did not want to explain what happens in journalism as a function of economic factors. (p. 39)

Bourdieu (1998) focuses on the subjective relationships between the agents of the field and their egoistic desire to monopolize the capital of power. Nevertheless, the peculiarity and integrity of the world of journalism are clearly highlighted (“microcosm with its own laws”). The latest media research in 14 European countries confirms and develops the idea of the sovereign value of the journalism's professional core:

Our analysis leads us to conclude that media policies should not only focus on observable elements of media systems and practices (such as ownership, public service broadcasting, and access to information) but should also find ways to promote various configurations of those

elements of journalism cultures that support the publication of quality information and journalistic content more generally. (Lauk & Harro-Loit, 2017, pp. 1967-1968)

In direct connection with the idea of the relative autonomy of journalism from external influences are the questions on professional qualifications of the "new" journalist, as well as on professional education. According to logic that we use, in this sphere, the straight-line subordination to changing environment, including technological environment also is unacceptable. If we limit the purpose and content of training to giving and getting labor skills, especially in their informational interpretation, the program will be built by the technological axis. Relatively, the priorities would be reflected in the following formulation: "...All journalism schools must broaden their curricula to emphasize data and computational practices as foundational skills. To place data journalism in the core of journalism education will mark a crucial advance in what schools can offer their students" (Berret & Phillips, 2016, p. 9). Of course, the technical components of qualification require greater attention. Nevertheless, in the dialectical dimension, another way of reasoning looks richer and more promising: since "journalism is seen as a self-referential and self-organizing system in society, with the specific function of preparing and making available themes for public communication", the desirable type of professional in contemporary education should be "the 'reflective practitioner', both as an educator, a scholar and a journalist" (Deuze, 2000, pp. 144, 151).

In a short article, we do not set ourselves the task of academically fully representing the substantive core of journalism. In this case, we will limit ourselves to critically assessing the unjustified identification of journalism with others, according to Bourdieu, fields. The principal incompatibility of journalism with business has already been mentioned above. Let us add the incorrectness of the now popular equalization of journalism to media, which should be regarded as a hypertrophied emphasizing the communicative and technological aspects of journalism. The definition of journalism as an activity for the collecting and disseminating relevant information that is widely spread in dictionaries and textbooks deserves a special criticism. It sounds as a distant echo of the 1960s, when a massive fascination of humanitarians with cybernetic ideas came, which led to the expansion of applied sociology with a pragmatic inclination in the American way. But since then, the world science has gone through several cycles of conceptual renewal and overcoming the former simplification. European scholars date the so-called sociological turn in the study of journalism by 1970-1980-ies, and in the 1990s a global-comparative turn occurred, based on the internationalization of projects and enriching the spectrum of views through the involving in the cooperation original national research schools. "The onward march of globalization notwithstanding, journalism studies is still an extremely diverse ... This diversity has been profoundly shaped by different national traditions, resulting from the fact that the field has borrowed unevenly from the social sciences and humanities" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009b, p. 7), the authors declare. The root cause is the national-cultural determinism of journalism itself, as experts from different countries insist (Aslan, Tuneva & Mengü, 2018; Lauk & Harro-Loit, 2017). Russian authors also believe that "intuition and analytical work of researchers from different countries, who feel the peculiarity of national journalism and its incompatibility with the canons of the liberal model, for Russian media

researchers, can serve as a sufficient basis for the theorizing on the national (Russian-speaking) ground” (Zagidullina, 2015, p. 66).

If to come back to the information-sociological interpretation of the journalistic activities, its failure is clearly seen because of many other agents act as information collectors and distributors, from empirical sociologists to bloggers as the antipodes of professional journalists. This explains why researchers strongly oppose sociological attempts to reduce journalism “to an instrument, trying to see in it only a neutral and technical transmission belt taking social events to a consumer audience” (Sodré, 2014, pp. 125-126). Such statements actually mean a call to abandon formalism and schematism in favor of realism in the research methodology, and Russian scholars are backing up such a position (Korkonosenko, 2016). Indeed, for adequate understanding the essence of the phenomenon not so much the act of data processing is important, as the content of activities, manifested in relation to reality.

In the epistemological dimension, one should talk on reflection. However, this is only the starting point, because the salt of the question is what the qualitative features of reflection are. In our previous publications, we have proposed to generalize these specific features in the concept of journalism lifelikeness (resemblance to life, to reality; in Russian – *zhiznepodobie*). Journalism is similar to life, it is like a life, its specific nature consists in the similarity to everyday life, even by virtue of its documentary basis, high actuality and penetration into all areas of the social world, both in thematic and in geographical dimensions (Korkonosenko 2019). Researchers from different countries emphasize the same attributes of the press interaction with existence of society and the person. Russian author writes: "Its role in the knowledge of the reality's relevant variability is huge ... its subject is the everyday life practice, the current variability that occurs in the relevant phenomena of reality" (Shkondin, 2016, p. 178). He was echoed by Brazilian scientist: “Journalism is a unique form of knowledge production ... the potential of journalistic production lies in its singularity of everyday action and consequently in the established dimension of relationships and events that constitute contemporary social reality” (Gadini, 2005, p. 137). Greatly important, that the arguments in the proposed coordinate system exactly correspond to the professional standards of journalism, among which the central places are given to reliability, accuracy, and efficiency as the desire to keep pace with the event variability of life.

7. Conclusion

There is a hope that the performed analysis provides the basis for formulating few important methodological conclusions. First, the additional clarity appears in the understanding of the object of the journalism theory and additional prospect for studying opens up. Second, the analysis confirms the possibility and necessity of changes at the manifestation level, including the dynamics of journalism content and forms, environments of existence and functioning, ways of interaction and contamination with other major phenomena, such as arts, science, economics, technology, and so long. Third, in this regard, when assessing the state and forecasting the ways of journalism evolution, the solutions should be based on the idea of the sustainment of its substantial integrity, despite the mobility of nowadays manifestations. In any case, focused attention to the essence serves as a guarantee against sporadic theoretical innovations, the overcoming of which requires considerable efforts when the euphoria of admiration concerning technological inventions passes. Technological determinism in the modern history

of science has been repeatedly refuted as a simplified and schematic paradigm. Hardly there is any reason to believe that this rule does not work in the theory of journalism. At different historical stages, the invention of telegraph, radio, TV only added to the possibilities of journalism and enriched knowledge on its creative and socio-cultural potential. And each time the newfangled concepts of technocrats were sent to the archive of theoretical thought.

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