19th PCSF 2019
Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future

POLITICAL JOURNALIST OF THE FUTURE:
IN SEARCH OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

This article focuses on the political journalist's professional identity and its features in the context of contemporary media system. Due to the increasing amount of information social uncertainty is rising and it is becoming harder to forecast media impact on the public perception. Conceptualization of journalist's professional identity is based on the interpretation of "political" category as a premise and result of journalist's character-building today. The merger of media and new technologies has resulted in convergence of the means of information delivery and hybridization of media in substantive level. Modern media system creates conditions where journalism effects are contradictory and ambivalent. The article also considers such factors affecting political journalist's self-identification as recruiting organization and its founders' proximity to the power structures, range of experts, party allegiance and journalist's skills including the level of technological equipment and understanding the modern network principles of information life. Existing studies in Russia, Europe and USA show that professional self-identification is blurred within personal, professional and virtual roles and results in hybrid identity that sometimes consists of mutually exclusive values. It is possible to suggest that structure changes in professional identity structure will affect the constituents of professionalism in the future.

1.   Introduction

Changes occurring in journalists' professional performance in recent decades are widely discussed by concerned media entities, experts, and scholars. Declining trust in journalism as a social institution (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018) – is a challenge to journalists, to which they respond not only by mastering new communicative roles and practices (Conboy, 2019; Deuze, 2008), but also by rethinking the essence of the profession and its future. Journalism is altering ideologically, technologically and even ethically, which actualizes its theoretical analysis and leads to reconsideration of the existing forms of vocational education (Kharlamov, Kharlamova, & Koroteeva, 2017; Trostinskaia, Safonova, & Pokrovskaia, 2017). The problems of journalist's professional identification in the post-truth era are particularly acute in political journalism. In the 2010s, populist victories in the elections in Europe and the USA and scandals related to handling of information in messengers in Asia and Latin America were media contributions to political tensions. The heated debate concerning privacy violations brought about the Leveson report and the Cambridge Analytica case. The symphony of established and modern media has failed: conventional journalism is retreating under the pressure of citizen or public journalism, which tends to be legally controlled by the state (for example, in the United States, Germany or Russia). Competing interpretations of the media transformation era and new media theories reflecting the technological context (Carbasse, 2015; Drok, & Hermans, 2016; Fenton, 2016; Vinogradova, Melnik, & Pantserev, 2018) imply that journalism must be rethought or even reinvented. The professional culture and the journalist's identity type being shaped under the conditions of a hybrid media system require scientific consideration.

2.   Problem Statement

With the rising information availability the level of uncertainty in the society is growing. To predict the effects of media entities on public spirit is a daunting task. Synthesis of new technologies and journalism has driven the processes of merging of information delivery methods and the hybridization of the media environment. M. McLuhan (1964) wrote about media as a hybrid expanding human capabilities. In the 2010s, E. Chadwick's hybrid media system concept has become prevalent. According to this concept hybridity is interpreted as a fusion of senses, effects and technologies, forming a new quality of the media environment (Chadwick, 2013). Modern hybrid media system revolving around content commercialization creates conditions in which the effects of journalism are contradictory. According to researches journalism is becoming ambient and liquid (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). Russian researchers note the emergence of a particular psychological type of journalists under the increasing use of digital media (Pronina, 2016). Studies in Russia, Europe, and the United States show that with the blurring frontiers between the network, personal, and corporate roles, professional self-recognition of a political journalist is hampered. Journalism turns into a political profession in modern society in the sense of the journalist's belonging to his "deep state" as a participant in the political struggle, political life, common interest as stated by Aristotle. The technical trait of journalist's profession includes mastering the network principle of information life. The level of journalist's competence, apart from employment period and experience, is determined by his understanding of the specific settings for converting

information into knowledge and his professional responsibility for the consequences of appropriating and applying the information he produces to solve social problems. In this case not only the journalist himself but professional educators and researches as well become concerned about the representation of professional identity.

3. Research Questions

In this article we will try to answer the following questions: what changes arise in the journalist's professional activity? How does the global digital information environment affect the settings, goals, means and samples of the political journalist's professional performance? What professional and personal characteristics of a political journalist should be considered in the conception of the journalist's professional identity that is emerging in the hybrid media sphere?

4. Purpose of the Study

The objectives of the paper are the analysis of the political journalist's self-recognition peculiarities under the hybridization of the media system and the conceptualization of the political journalist's professional identity.

5. Research Methods

Basing on comparison, interpretation, generalization of expert interviews, public opinion polls, overt observation, document analysis, content analysis of media texts, discourse analysis of theoretical studies, the professional reality of contemporary journalism is modelled and the professional identity of a political journalist is conceptualized.

6. Findings

At the turn of the XXI century media system is transformed under the influence of fundamental processes of convergence, globalization, and digitalization. Changes arising in world journalism are interpreted in a new way. In the previous one hundred and fifty years, with journalism as a social institution evolving, the fundamentals of the journalist's professional existence were debated. In the industrial period of Western society journalism emerged from literary work and publicistic writing and was formed under capitalist competition between leading newspapers. By the end of the XX century, journalism already exists as an intermediate activity at various social levels (Ruellan, 2017). Social and political transformations and economic systems universalization made it possible to raise the issue of global journalism. The role and professional recognition of journalists is interpreted in empirical studies as well as in theoretical generalizations (Shoemaker, & Reese, 1996; Weaver, & Wu, 1998). Surveys of the global nature of journalism are conducted on a regular basis (Willnat, Weaver, & Choi, 2013). The dimension, that is beyond any doubt and is common to different national and regional journalistic practices, is a commercial one. At the same time, it is argued that there is no multi-method approach relating journalists' personal features, their attitude to profession, the specifics of organizations producing

news content, as well as social influences to the types and characteristics of journalistic writing. By the end of the 2010s, in studies examining the qualitative side of media systems, journalists and their vocational self-awareness, the focus on the commercial side of the process is increasingly turning to technological factors (Carbasse, 2015; Fenton, 2016; Vinogradova et al., 2018). At the same time, attempts to comprehend, conceptualize and model the emerging quality of modern journalism are rare. In general, it appears that journalism is evolving in accordance with the logic of post-industrial development, despite the public revaluation of the importance of communication technologies (Deuze, 2017). The principal activity is formulating and solving adaptation problems occurring in constantly changing circumstances, which requires new tactics, concepts and organizational structures (Aladyshkin, Kulik, Michurin, & Anosova, 2017). In attempt to meet the demands of the professional environment and the audience, educational institutions introduce new programs aimed at building competencies sought for in multimedia and digital journalism (Vartanova, & Lukina, 2017; Vinogradova, Melnik, & Pantserev, 2018).

Changes in journalistic work and its outcome result from the new quality of the information and technological environment. Transformations in the information reality are often specified in light of the recent political communications crisis, associated with information pressure from media structures and the general uncertainty of political discourse (Shipunova & Kuznetsov, 2015). The spreading on the digital web of the communication practices of trolling, bullying (harassment) and such pseudo-forms of public information as the media virus or fake, as well as its varieties (pseudo-facts, pseudo-events, web pages, people, genres, etc.) make it possible to describe crises in journalist's professional existence, as stated in postmodern theories, as a splitting of the information environment, which previously valued objectivity and the search for truth, into many foci of subjectivism. Since these phenomena bring about the loss of public trust in traditional media, other ways of producing and exchanging socially important information emerge as a response "from below". They are referred to as: citizen journalism, public journalism or participatory journalism. Thus, the ontology of modern information contains two dynamic components: the political and economic transformation of identity under the transition of privacy to publicity and the social aspect of influence resulted from the redistribution of power depending on emotional preference factors (Beckett & Deuze, 2016). The abundance of information, in turn, led to the emergence of new practices related to information verification and recording (fact-checking, data and screenshot journalism, etc.), forcing media employees to replace the previous roles of gatekeepers with - gatewatchers (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). Theoretical understanding of press, media system in general and mass communications of the second half of the XX century (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963; McQuail, 1987; Nordenstreng, 1997) loses its explanatory potential with the cumulative integration of different types of media into new forms of information production and new and novel journalism. Researchers note the need for relevant media theories to give account of this area in the context of new technologies (Spyridou, Matsiola, Veglis, Kalliris, & Dimoulas, 2013).

We believe, the concept of E. Chadwick's hybrid media system that became widespread in Western scientific discourse is worth considering. According to this concept the new logic of media system development implies not replacing of previous forms of presenting journalistic content (press and broadcasting) with new media, but fusion, coexistence and interdependence of different media forms

(Chadwick, 2013). In this regard, the principles of information flows establishing and the influence tactics of persons concerned (for example, politicians) on the content of the agenda are modified. The new rules, especially with regard to the publicity of political communication, destabilize the position of elites, who are accustomed to the old formats and information security and force them to adapt to the new information reality. This provokes a new balance between information protection and availability; open and closed media systems (Deuze, 2008). Thus, hybridity arises as a result of convergence (Alexander, 2015). Under liberal democracy, the media system combines two modes of its existence: one, dating back to the 1970s and having expanded with the growing value of television in mass communication and another, which emerged in the late 2000s under the influence of network platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media dysfunctions are the most visible negative effect of a hybrid media system, interpreted by the public as a challenge and a concern (Boldyreva, Grishina, & Duisembina, 2018). In media research discourse, such terms as "ecosystem", "media virus", "information pollution", borrowed from natural sciences, in particular, biology and ecology, are used to describe it. Some researchers note the correlation between quality and conventional set of professional skills. In new media, replacing skills with the ability to work with technologies can lead to quality reduction (Örnebring & Mellado, 2018). Digital inequality under information overflow, the arrival of monopolies in content production, lead to negative social and political outcomes, although quantity does not always mean quality. In addition, business practice of ranking the quality and quantity of information provided for a fee (paywall, advertisement removal, etc.) is introduced in the media. This also leads to audience stratification. Coupled with government practices limiting the national segments of the network, this can lead to balkanization of the Internet (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Broadly, we can assume that at present we are witnessing changes in journalism essence. The consequences can be twofold: they can lead both to an increase in the democratic commitment of the media as a social institution, and to the revision and improvement of existing business models under neo-liberalism when journalism transforms into a news market (Conboy, 2019).

M. Castells, the author of the theory of network society (a type of society, whose social structure is based primarily on networks formed by new technologies), states two dimensions of the media system crisis (Castells, Parks, & van der Haak, 2012). The first is related to the crisis of business models in the media and does not stir up scientific community's sympathy, since it does not negate the conventional understanding of media as a socially important institution, and journalism as a useful activity concentrated on public benefit. The second is associated with the need for traditional journalism, as a social institution, at the current stage of social development. The fact is that people value journalism less. It's easier for them to learn what's happening on Twitter and Facebook. Citizen journalism resources let the public find information that is more relevant to individual requests, despite the obvious ease of manipulating the trust of new media audience (Evseeva, Bashkarev, Pozdeeva, & Tarakanova, 2018) Researchers often raise the straight question: why do we need journalists, when people can find out everything themselves? (Jolley, 2014). The issue of journalist's recognition and his professional self-determination in the new settings should be considered both in axiological and anthropological perspectives. When we analyze only technical means of information production, we obviate the complications in determining the criteria of professionalism. Still they arise when we turn to the social context. In Western society realities and, in particular, liberal democracy, which is viewed by the global

academic community as a natural environment for modern media, the core values of professional journalism usually comprise: autonomy, public service, objectivity, immediacy (Ahva, 2013; Lauk, & Harro-Loit, 2017). Russian scholars believe that creativity, objectivity and expertise stand out most often as the key criteria for journalistic professionalism. At the same time, professionalism in the media is perceived in a discursive way, as something formed in professional interaction and is recognized by expert communities. Accordingly, identity is also devised discursively (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Sometimes, instead of identity, a more flexible and dynamic concept of "identification" is used. Still we prefer a constructive interpretation of the concept of identity, which provides insight into its significant features, such as instability and susceptibility tooutside influence. In other words, identity is not viewed as a "taken for granted", but as a "task" (Hanitzsch, 2017). Professional identity can be considered on three levels. The first level implies the social characteristics of specialist's environment; the second level is related to career features and personality traits of a professional; the third level shows how the individual's life experience has shaped his values and priorities, as well as his desire to identify with certain expert groups (Slay & Smith, 2011).

The results of global and regional studies of journalists' professional values indicate a rising significance of technological and corporate resources in their professional performance (Hanitzsch, 2017; Mellado et al., 2017). In particular, the professional identity of a journalist is linked to work context, and a change of context leads either to leaving the profession or identity changing (Nikunen, 2014; Sherwood & O'Donnell, 2018). In addition, journalists identify themselves with the organization (Holton & Molyneux, 2017). Regional differences in professional orientations are noticed, as a rule, between Western and post-socialist countries, since in the latter even the traditional professional identity of journalists is dawning due to economic reasons (Lowrey & Erzikova, 2012). For example, some studies contain findings that some journalists in developing countries will not benefit from accepting a set of professional approaches and values common in the Western society, as this will bring about the loss of additional sources of income (Örnebring, 2016). As for the technological part, it is necessary to note the crucial significance of mastering journalist's technical skills. Some studies dividing journalists by the criterion of belonging either to legacy media or new social media emphasize that among journalists of new media, skills of using network platforms are vital for achieving a certain effect in journalism, and for traditional media workers the importance of these skills is growing.

Thus, the factors impacting the professional identity of a contemporary journalist, in addition to conventional guidelines, comprise the power of the professional context and specifics of the organization in which the journalist works, as well as the technological component, forcing the journalist to master new ways and platforms for information dissemination. The last factor is crucial, as it involves both professional and personal life of a journalist, thereby directly influencing his self-identification, since at present the journalist is not only to have a live communication, but also a virtual one, carefully creating a network image and communication strategies. Therefore, a virtual personality is shaped, whose cognitive vector of behavior is aimed at complete immersion in media reality and dependence on the media (Gashkova, Berezovskaya, & Shipunova, 2018).

The issue of peculiarities of political journalists' professional recognition is the most acute, since their activities engage with political power. Let us highlight the factors that hinder the professional

identification of today's journalist specializing in political issues. Firstly, a political journalist faces a contradiction between an objective reflection of political life, demands of the audience, his personal and political views, as well as the attitudes of the media (if he is bound by certain obligations). This contradiction is resolved especially hard in modern Russian media, since any political views are ambivalent. Secondly, the professional identification of today's political journalist is complicated by the convergence of the political and journalistic spheres, as a result of which journalists and politicians change places. Journalists become participants in the political sphere and politicians in the journalistic one. Thirdly, the establishment of political journalists' "corporation" creates difficulties. The corporation turns into the most important reference group. Commitment to it may distort the portrayal of political reality, promote ignoring of the audience needs and abstracting from the social process. This may also include the dependence of journalists on business and political structures, whose requirements the journalist is forced to obey in order to carry out unhindered professional performance and receive remuneration for it. And finally, if we consider political journalism as a universal journalistic occupation, because journalistic statements somehow affect politics, it becomes clear how fine the line between politics and journalism is, how difficult it is for a journalist not to cross it and establish a balance.

Highlighting the meaning of M. McLuhan's classic statement "the medium is the message", it can be argued that modern network information reality produces a qualitatively new way of journalists' life, influences both the outcome of their activities and their professional identification. Under media system hybridization, changes in the professional identification of the journalist also occur: a hybrid identity is formed. Since the end of the XX century, this term has become common in social science and humanities, mainly in cultural studies, linguistics, and ethno-political studies. Generally, identity is considered a derivative of culture. In linguistic and literary works, in particular, this type of identity explains individual's linguistic and social behavior across different cultures or texts, including parts of different linguistic systems (the so-called creolized text, for example, advertising or comics). In the 1990s, in political theory, "hybrid identity" replaced the "identity crisis", a concept that was previously used to describe individuals forced into foreign political culture, for example, migrants. From social philosophy perspective, hybrid identities come up in the course of adaptation of traditionalist structures to modernity, and are viewed as possible sources of modernization as well as archaization and disintegration of society. Furthermore, in some sociological studies, the term is used to describe self-recognition at the interface of real and virtual behavior. The dictionary of media research language already contains such terms as hybrid media system, hybrid media and hybrid media text. The concept of hybrid identity for this language is new. This term implies a fusion of traditional orientations with new ones that have originated as a result of the integration of digital technologies into journalistic practices. Surprisingly, this identity can be concentrated not only on traditional for journalism objectivity and autonomous coverage of facts and events. It can also focus on transprofessionalism, conscious and unconscious promotion of political and business corporations values, the commercial interests of the organization in which the journalist works, specific techniques and ways of information delivery (virality, nativeness), provoking conflicts and discussions in order to attract the audience and generate network traffic (fake, trolling, etc.), and so on. Autonomy, objectivity, credibility and the pursuit of truth in journalism distinguish the relation "event-describer", corresponding to journalist's classic professional existence. The hybrid nature of the

journalist's professional reality expresses the initial splitting, fluctuation of socio-economic conditions of the activity, which he joins as its active participant - the political commentator. He turns into a hermeneut of signs, hints, signs and opinions. He covers not only events and facts, but themes and problems as well, engaging in political problems solving (presidential and gubernatorial elections; selection of priority topics for discussions; attention to cult figures). Hybridity is manifested not only in confusion and substitution of participants in the event, its conditions and circumstances (fake news), but also in confusion of times: in replacing the present with the future ("life as a project") or a parallel present (playing "parallel time").

7. Conclusion

In this article an attempt was undertaken to review the factors affecting the professional self-recognition of today's media employee, a political journalist in particular, and to propose a conceptualization of his identity in the current context. As the merger of traditional media with new platforms becomes irreversible, the constant splitting of the spatial and temporal characteristics of media events provokes a split in the political journalist's professional identity. This forces him to either commercialize success and leave the profession or to assert his worldview for the maturation of which he is responsible as an expert and individual. The conflict in the political journalist's professional self-recognition as an actor in the global digital information setting is caused by his awareness of moving away from tradition, the trans-professionalism of his activities and identity hybridization. Studies of the journalist's professional "well-being", modelling professional reality, conceptualization of professional identity promoted an interdisciplinary understanding of the changes in the professional stratification of modern society and the future of professional institutions and vocational education.

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